Playful Platonist : The development of ideas in the novels of Iris Murdoch

Thesis

PLAYFUL PLATONIST:THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS IN THE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines Iris Murdoch's novels in the light of her philosophical thinking.It places her ethical thinking in the context of twentieth century moral philosophy and shows that her approach to the problems of the subject is out of key with the general run of contemporary philosophical thinking.It traces her debt to G.E.Moore,and the modification which she offers of the Intuitionist view of Ethics,as she develops the significance,for her,of learning to see the appropriateness of concepts to the facts of the case,and of the value of 'attention' in the development of moral behaviour.

The thesis outlines the way in which Iris Murdoch's early interest in the existentialist philosophy of Sartre becomes a firm point of philosophical objection.She finds that Sartre's disgust with the contingency of the world is based on a defensive solipsism,and argues that the world beyond the self should be a matter for delight and instruction in the insignificance of the individual.It further shows how her fundamental philosophical beliefs are indebted to Plato,in that she follows him in attributing to beauty a significance as a guide to the good,and also in equating love with knowledge of the external world.

It points out that Iris Murdoch's comments on the novel have often been used to attack her own fictional practice,and suggests that this practice is mistaken.It points out the significance of the essay 'Existentialists and Mystics',which has been neglected by critics,both in terms of illuminating her interests and purposes and also in providing appropriate terminology with which to discuss her novels.

The thesis then examines the individual novels and traces the evolution of Iris Murdoch's ideas in them from an interest in,but philosophical hostility to,existentialism,towards the 'mystical' novel which celebrates reality beyond the self,and sees freedom as obedience to that external reality.It suggests that Iris Murdoch consistently attempts to develop secular concepts which will take the place of the religious concepts which she feels are no longer appropriate.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this Thesis is my own unaided work, and that none of it has appeared previously in any other form.

INTRODUCTION

Iris Murdoch's literary career has been prolific:twenty-one novels, four plays and a collection of poetry in addition to a wide range of essays and two books of ethics attest to an imagination of considerable fertility. Whether this production is the work of a serious literary artist,and if it is,what kind of artist she might be,are matters of greater debate.There have been those who have doubted whether someone who writes so much can write well enough to justify claims to high status[1],and there are others who see her work as significantly developing the traditions of the English novel[2].The most recent study of her work claims that there is a 'current tendency to under-read and underestimate Murdoch's work'[3] but makes the final claim that

> Her ambitions in relation to the traditional novel and in the moral aggrandizement of that form are extensive and unique in the late twentieth century,and her equipment for achieving and illustrating a very great deal has,in twenty novels,displayed itself compellingly.[4]

However,before the appearance of the two most recent studies of her work[5] the attention of critics had been directed mainly at her earlier work,and had tended also to use her earlier statements about the state of the novel as a standard to criticize Iris Murdoch's own productions.[6] The much noted distinction,made in 'Against Dryness'[7],between the 'journalistic' descendant of the nineteenth century novel and the 'crystalline' novel of the twentieth century has been used to attack its author by comparing her achievement with what was thought to be her wish to produce novels of a nineteenth century character,thus suggesting that she failed to achieve that density and opacity of character which she has said she is so attracted to.

But that'Against Dryness',which was written almost a quarter of a century ago,should represent her final thought on the novel seems as unlikely as that A Severed Head,also written in 1961,should represent her final achievement. From one who is so clearly thoughtful about the contemporary picture of

man and the world,and so aware of the differences between that world and the more stable world of the nineteenth century,we are right to expect a continuing development of ideas and a consequent development of novelistic style.Although the early novels share some features with the later ones,as the early essays share some with the more recent,there has been a gradual change in the orientation of Iris Murdoch's thought which is reflected in her novels.The poles of this drift are marked by her first and her most recent book-length studies.In 1953 she published Sartre:Romantic Rationalist[8], and in 1977 The Fire and the Sun:Why Plato Banished the Artists[9].This movement,from existentialism to platonism,is reflected in the novels and is the reason why essays that have appeared during her career cannot be accepted as necessarily definitive statements of her views.They provide pointers to the way in which her ideas have developed and to the way in which she has modified some of her existing concepts as well as introducing new ones.

Iris Murdoch has always been a strong critic of the contemporary novel. She is fond of pointing out that it is not as good as the nineteenth century novel[10];and argues that this is primarily related to an inadequate theory of the liberal personality.What is interesting about these pronouncements is that they are not really literary criticism at all,but are indicative of a broadly based philosophical attitude or sense of value.[11] She objects to the manner and the style of contemporary novels not because they are badly written but because they reflect ideas about the human personality which she does not think are true.(This is a far more important claim than that she does not like them,or does not believe in them.)For her,the novel is an art of image,but it is what those images represent that is of greater concern to her than the images themselves.So,in the final analysis,her comment on Sartre's impatience with 'the stuff of human life'[12] is an objection to his ethical views rather than a criticism of his literary technique.

And yet she has said that philosophy ' had better be kept out' of

literature[13], and that she only includes it because she happens to know about it and would rather prefer to know about sailing ships. The critics, however, do not accept this dismissal. Rubin Rabinovitz remarks of similar comments:

> The futility of Iris Murdoch masking the ideas in her novels, of her denials that she is a philosophical novelist, should be obvious to the reader who has managed to get through the necessary background material. Miss Murdoch is as involved with ideas as Conrad was with the sea.[14]

What sense, then, can be made of the claim that Iris Murdoch is a philosophical novelist despite her own denial of this? We can find illumination in her interview with Bryan Magee for the television series Men of Ideas (1978), and we should note that Magee is a philosopher. We should also bear in mind that Iris Murdoch is herself a philosopher and that she makes her denial from this background. Given the current tradition of British analytical philosophy she is likely to use words with considerable precision. In the interview she makes the following statement:

> I am reluctant to say that the deep structure of any good literary work could be a philosophical one . . . Ideas in art must suffer a sea-change. . . There is always something moral which goes down further than the ideas, the structures of good literary works are to do with erotic mysteries and deep dark struggles between good and evil.[15]

One should note here that she is talking about the 'deep structure' of a literary work not being philosophical, although she admits that 'ideas' will appear in art, although they will be transformed in some way. And earlier in the same discussion she has drawn the distinction between philosophy, which 'aims to clarify and to explain', and literature which aims to entertain and is 'full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification'.[16]

Fundamentally, Iris Murdoch is using the term 'philosophy' as a philosopher; by it she means the process of analysis by which a particular problem is clarified and dealt with in an impersonal manner:

> Philosophical writing is not self-expression, it involves a disciplined

> removal of the personal voice . . . But there is a kind of self-expression that remains in literature,together with all the playfulness and mystification of art.[17]

Her denial that she is a philosophical novelist rests on the sense that a novel is not a work of analysis.It is noticeable that Rabinovitz,and other critics,fail to use terms with the same rigour as Iris Murdoch.For him,she is a philosophical novelist because she is concerned with 'ideas', and this position is shared by most other critics,including A.S.Byatt, although she has some qualms about applying the label.[18]However,in her insistence that the characters in a Murdoch novel should be approached through the theme she illustrates her belief that the author's philosophy is important to the novels.But,as Iris Murdoch herself is at pains to point out:

> good literature does not look like 'analysis',because what the imagination produces is sensuous,fused,reified,mysterious,ambiguous, particular.Art is cognition in another mode.[19]

We should recall here that there is,as Iris Murdoch writes in another context,an 'old quarrel between philosophy and poetry'[20] as ways to the truth.Art does not demonstrate in an analytical sense,but shows images which reflect the complexity and mystery of life in a way which is beyond the reach of analysis.For Iris Murdoch,literary images relate to life quite directly,since they are an extension of an everyday process in which

> we are constantly employing language to make interesting forms out of experience which perhaps originally seemed dull and incoherent.[21]

Her novels constantly rework ideas which can be found articulated in a very different mode in the essays in The Sovereignty of Good (1970)[22],but that reworking also serves to develop the ideas themselves.Iris Murdoch believes that philosophy should not be a detached exercise,but should help people decide what to do,and her novels sometimes seem to be test-beds for her ideas.If they work in the novel,then they should work in the larger arena of life itself.

What is clear is that her ethics are in many ways better served by the images of art than they are by the analysis of philosophy.A central tenet of her ethical view is that the world should be celebrated as a mysterious and 'other' entity.It is more appropriate to demonstrate this through the curiously dense contingency of the world in an Iris Murdoch novel than it is through an analytical statement.And yet there is the sense that she believes philosophy is the higher activity;commenting on Plato's view of art she writes

> Images are valuable aids to thought;we study what is higher first 'in images'.[23]

And her images present what she thinks is true of humankind,that

> We are what we seem to be,transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance.[24]

They also present characters who frequently have no adequate sense of motive, for that is how she perceives the situation.At best human motivation is difficult to understand,and is always likely to be obscured by the activities of the ego.She has a profound distrust of the limited self-examination which passes for psychological self-awareness.For her it is the world outside the individual that is of moral significance,not the individual himself.Indeed, her awareness is ethical rather than psychological,a point noted,although with the awkwardness of terminology which has been discussed above,by Edward Thomas.[25]

The philosophical background to Iris Murdoch's novels provides much of the terminology with which to discuss them.But in the end,perhaps,one should bear in mind that art and philosophy are rivals of some kind,and that Iris Murdoch sometimes seems profoundly sceptical of philosophy.In The Fire and the Sun she comments:

> Perhaps in general art proves more than philosophy can.Familiarity with an art form and the development of taste is an education in the beautiful which involves the often largely instinctive,increasingly confident sorting out of what is good,what is pure,what is profoundly

> and justly imagined,what rings true,from what is trivial or shallow or in some way fake,self-indulgent,pretentious,sentimental,meretriciously obscure and so on.[26]

British Ethics From Moore to Hampshire

Before proceeding to an account of Iris Murdoch's own ethical views it is necessary to offer some account of the position in ethical thinking which is occupied by the majority of moral philosophers working in Britain. Iris Murdoch has announced that ,in ethics,she is attempting 'a movement of return'[27] to some of the ideas of G.E.Moore.She wishes to draw attention to what she believes are some facts about ethical situations which contemporary moral philosophy has theorized away.

A year after Iris Murdoch published The Sovereignty of Good (1970), Bryan Magee published Modern British Philosophy[28],a book which originated in a series of discussions on BBC radio during the winter of 1970-1971. It is thus exactly of a period with Iris Murdoch's work.In the conversation, recorded in the book,between Magee and Bernard Williams,Magee comments that

> moral philosophy (is) a subject which is felt by most of its leading practitioners to have fallen into a profoundly unsatisfactory state.[29]

It is this unsatisfactory state of affairs against which Iris Murdoch is reacting and which is essentially the history of the subject since the time of G.E.Moore.

Moore published Principia Ethica in 1903;in it he claimed that 'good' was a simple but indefinable property,and that any attempt to define 'good' was to commit what he called the 'naturalistic fallacy'[30]. Since 'good' cannot be defined,although one may say what things are,as a matter of fact, good,Moore is held to be an Intuitionist

> sharing this label with philosophers such as Prichard and Ross who agreed that moral intuition was the basis of moral judgement even if they disagreed about where the intuitions came in.An intuitionist

> is one who believes that in the end we must 'see' that certain things are good,or right ,or obligatory.Up to a certain point,they say,one may argue about morals,showing that individual cases fall under particular principles by the nature of the facts;but in the end one is driven back to a point at which one can say nothing but 'I see it to be so'.[31]

Opposition to Moore's intuitionism,criticizing it for the lack of any independent check of these supposed moral intuitions led to the development of Emotivism,connected with the work of A.J.Ayer in Language,Truth and Logic,[32] but achieving full expression in the work of C.L.Stevenson,particularly in his book Ethics and Language [33].Stevenson claimed that moral statements were not in any real sense statements about the world as they had no verifiable substance,being in essence statements about the preferences of the person making the statement:

> he suggests that the meaning of 'This is good' is more or less the same as the meaning of 'I like this.Like it as well.'But in the latter phrase the element of command is explicit,whereas in 'this is good' it is implicit.The emotive force of 'this is good' is therefore subtle while in the supposed analysis it is crude.[34]

Stevenson believed that the emotivist position answered Moore's worries about defining good (i.e. it did not commit the naturalistic fallacy) but avoided the problems of intuitionism because there was nothing there to be the subject of intuition.Both intuitionists and emotivists believe that moral statements are not susceptible to ordinary kinds of proof.

A further development of this kind of thinking was Prescriptivism,best characterized by the work of R.M.Hare[35],which saw moral statements as concealed imperatives instructing someone else to think as the speaker does.

> Hare had connected the evaluative use of language with the acceptance of first person imperatives,and quasi-imperatives,addressed to the world at large.He could,therefore,claim that on his theory value

judgements were essentially 'action guiding',bearing this relation to both the speaker's own actions and to those of other people.[36]

Both of these developments out of Moore concentrated on the speech acts themselves rather than on what moral judgements might be about.They are symptomatic of the linguistic development in moral philosophy in that they ask 'What is it to make a moral judgement and how is this kind of evaluative act related to other forms of evaluation?' rather than 'What is a good act?'[37]

In parallel with these developments in moral philosophy,which stressed the public aspects of making moral statements by analysing how they affected other people's attitudes and actions,went the development of the philosophy of mind.Professor Gilbert Ryle,in The Concept of Mind[38],attacked what he saw as Descartes's myth,which he called 'the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine'[39].He summarized this as follows:

> The official doctrine,which hails from Descartes,is something like this.With the doubtful exception of idiots and infants in arms every human being has both a body and a mind.Some would prefer to say that every human being is both a body and a mind.His mind and his body are ordinarily harnessed together,but after the death of the body his mind may continue to exist and function.
>
> Human bodies are in space and are subject to mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in space.Bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observers.So a man's bodily life is as much a public affair as are the lives of animals and reptiles and even the careers of trees,crystals and planets.
>
> But minds are not in space,nor are their operations subject to laws.The workings of one mind are not witnessable by other observers; its career is private.Only I can take direct cogniscance of the states and processes of my own mind.[40]

Ryle claims that if the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine were true then people would be absolute mysteries to each other.He substitutes for this a behaviouristic account in which one's mental states are not merely deducible from one's bodily actions,but in which public acts <u>are</u> the activities of

the mind:

> when we describe people as exercising qualities of mind,we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects;we are referring to those overt acts and utterances themselves.[41]

The combined influence of Ryle's philosophy and the development of the linguistic analysis of moral statements led to an emphasis on the Will as the major moral factor in any one individual.Moral behaviour is,on this view, characteristically action in the world,and in this supports the unity of the mind and body.On this account consciousness consists in knowing what one is doing,and any feeling is simply inconceivable without a tendency to action. There is no line which separates inner feelings from public actions[42].And consequently,a high place is accorded to the concept of 'freedom',for the morally active individual is free to exercise his will in a valueless world.

There is here a connexion between the development of British philosophy and the work of continental philosophers,particularly Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre,too,sees 'freedom' as the most significant moral concept,claiming that human beings are condemned to be free.The works of Stuart Hampshire bring together the Rylean denial of the ghost in the machine and the existentialist value for freedom.He claims that

> it is almost certain that anyone believing that the virtues attainable by the exercise of the will are the supreme virtues will find the grounds of his belief in a philosophical doctrine of freedom as the distinguishing feature of men:and he will interpret freedom as the exercise of will in practical decision.[43]

For Hampshire,'good' is only an adjective of limited comparison.

Stuart Hampshire does not command a position in the development of philosophy as significant as Gilbert Ryle's,but he is important in this context because it is he with whom Iris Murdoch takes issue in her own writing,using him as an example of a contemporary philosophical standpoint.[44]

The Early Struggle with Existentialism

The position of Sartre:Romantic Rationalist (1953) in terms of Iris Murdoch's ideas is significant.She has been thought of as an existentialist, indeed,she has described herself in this way,at least in her early career,[45] and the major study of her earlier work,A.S.Byatt's Degrees of Freedom, specifically sees her writing in terms of the central existentialist concept.But Sartre actually reveals a profound ambivalence about the values of existentialism,an ambivalence which is also found in Iris Murdoch's two earliest published articles[46].In ethical terms it is clear that Iris Murdoch disagrees with Sartre's position.She claims that La Nausée does not represent 'normal novelistic procedure' in that

> the writer's attention is focused on this unusual point,this point at which our beliefs,our world pictures,our politics,relgion,loves and hates are seen to be discontinuous with the selves that may or may not go on affirming them.[47]

But at the same time as objecting to the ethical position occupied by Sartre's novels she finds the existentialist hero appealing:

> These people are appealing but they are never enchanting - and the worlds in which they live are without magic and without terror. There is here none of the enticing mystery of the unknown.[48]

It seems that what is meant here by the distinction between 'appealing' and 'enchanting' offered here is that the existentialist hero has a certain limited appeal;he does not completely convince the reader of his reality any more than the world which he inhabits has the necessary 'magic'.(It is worth noting that Iris Murdoch's use of the term 'magic' here is approving; later in her career (see,for instance,the discussion of Shakespeare in The Nice and the Good (p 102)) 'magic' is opposed to 'spirit',and is used as a much more critical term.)

In Sartre Iris Murdoch treats Jean-Paul Sartre's novels as vehicles for his ideas.Her comments on La Nausée and Les Chemins des Liberté are almost entirely in terms of the concepts which she feels are embodied in

them.Her complaint about the novels is that they do not provide adequate images of the concepts which Sartre is concerned to disseminate.She feels that the ideas have not been sufficiently subject to that 'sea-change' which she claims is necessary for ideas to be used in fiction.[49] Sartre,in her view,relies too heavily on analysis,which she thinks is inappropriate in a novel.The approach of her book is largely descriptive,expounding the connexions to be found between the ideas of L'Etre et Le Néant and the novels. She sees Sartre's work as centred around four points.Firstly,a horror at the alien otherness of the world;secondly,the absolute demand made by the freedom of the individual;thirdly,'bad faith',the acceptance of a pose or role which appears to demand behaviour of a certain type,but which actually involves the individual in trying to avoid the imperatives of his freedom; fourthly,the inevitable warfare of personal relations,as the freedom of one individual is pitted against the freedom of another.

The novels,she claims,are didactic,attempting to force the reader to confront his own existentialist predicament.For Iris Murdoch,this is one of the philosophical objections to Sartre's work.His arguments amount to philosophically persuasive definitions - we may or may not be impressed, but there is little in terms of firm logical analysis which might enable us to see the value of an unpalatable truth.

But it is clear that her major objection is a matter of belief ,rather than knowledge.She believes that Sartre has elevated into a permanent state of affairs what is essentially a temporary feeling.Iris Murdoch claims that we all suffer from ennui,a passing state of mind in which the world seems random,pointless and hostile to oneself.Sartre,she claims,has elevated this into a permanent state of being,angst. But she also thinks that in his analysis of that state he is at his most profound,as in the passage if La Nausée which reveals the horrifyingly viscous nature of the world. But despite her admiration for this ,it is not a view she shares;what Sartre finds disgusting and horrifying is for Iris Murdoch mystifying and beautiful.She can argue that Sartre's solipsism is logically incorrect,in

that it fails to take account of the existence of others in the world,but she can only say of Sartre's nausea at the sheer contingent variety of the world that she does not see it that way.In the end,it boils down to a difference in temperament.

In terms of philosophical analysis,Iris Murdoch's major objection to Sartre is that he uses the term 'freedom' with what she calls a 'stupefying ambiguity':

> 'Freedom' in the sense in which Sartre originally defined it is the character of any human awareness of anything;its tendency to 'flicker' to shift towards a reflective state;its lack of equilibrium . . . The second sense of 'freedom' . . . seems more like a sort of spiritual discipline;it is a purging of the emotions,a setting aside of selfish considerations,a respect for the autonomy of another's (the writer's) creative power,which leads to a respect for the autonomy of all other men . . .
>
> 'Freedom' in the third sense is that which it is self-contradictor for a writer to traduce,that which I must effectively will for others as well as myself if I am exercising my consciousness as a human being 'properly'.[50]

Of course these definitions come from different stages in Sartre's career, a point which Iris Murdoch seems aware of ('originally defined it') but which she does not give much weight to.She does not indicate whether Sartre himself was aware of the development in his use of the concept or not.It remains true,however,that the central concept of existentialism is used by him in rather imprecise ways.But the main objection of Iris Murdoch to Sartre's work is not to his use of language,but to his solipsism:

> The universe of L'Etre et le Neant is solipsistic.Other people enter it one at a time,as the petrifying gaze of the Medusa,or at best as the imperfectly understood adversary in the fruitless conflict of love.What determines the form of this egocentric and non social world are the movements of love and hate,project and withdrawal, embarrassment and domination,brooding and violence,fascination and awakening,by which the individual 'takes' his life.There is no reason

> why the personage portrayed in L'Etre et le Néant should prefer one thing to another or do this rather than that - unless perhaps it were to avoid the discomfort of,say,being observed,or pursuing some peculiarly fruitless end.The analysis offered in L'Etre et le Néant may increase self-knowledge,lead to a starting point - but not indicate a road.[51]

And her objections to the novels follow the same argument.

In her later work her objections to existentialism become focussed more firmly around the limitations of the solipsistic world of the existentialist hero,although it is never entirely certain that she demonstrates the philosophical inadequacies of the position.What is undeniable is that she records her increasing disssatisfaction with such a position, and that the fascination for the figure of the solitary doubting will of the existentialist hero wanes as her career develops.

A 'Movement of Return'

Iris Murdoch's central ethical theory is contained in the essays collected in The Sovereignty of Good (1970).Here she attempts to present her 'movement of return'[52],a movement in direct opposition to the history of ethics since the time of G.E.Moore,for Iris Murdoch states 'in anticipation that on almost every point I agree with Moore and not with his critics'.[53]Iris Murdoch is a frank Intuitionist;she conceives of the 'good' as analogous with the 'beautiful',both are aspects of a thing or a person or a situation which one comes to 'see'.In opposition to the prevailing view of morals as public behavioural questions,she attempts to restore the privacy of moral behaviour,arguing that moral concepts are different in kind from concepts such as 'decision' and 'red' which can be learned and defined publicly,and which formed the paradigms in Ryle's argument.As she remarks about Ryle's work:

> The 'world' of The Concept of Mind is the world in which people play cricket,cook cakes,make simple decisions,remember their

> childhood and go to the circus,not the world in which they commit sins,fall in love,say prayers or join the Communist party.[54]

She wishes to restore the notion that the mind can act without any corresponding publicly observable behaviour.Moral choice,for Iris Murdoch, is not a matter of the will,but of something like obedience to an external reality.

She believes that the current position of moral philosophy has been impoverished by concentrating on the general moral terms like 'good' and 'right',and that more attention should be given to secondary moral terms, such as 'justice' and 'love'.This is a view shared by Phillipa Foot,who says:

> moral philosophy has benefited <u>relatively</u> little from the revolution which has everywhere turned our attention to everyday language,and the more or less patient investigation of detail.It is strange,for instance,that as late as 1956 Geach should have had to argue that evaluation should not be represented by the,generally,senseless 'X is good'.And it is strange that more work has not been done on such concepts as that of an attitude,and on the small (or large?) differences between such things as approving,commending,recommending, advising,praising,evaluating and the like.[55]

Above all,Iris Murdoch does not simply analyse how moral statements are used, but through her suggestions about what constitutes moral behaviour she proposes answers to that question of Moore's which philosophers since time have thought was not a legitimate part of their concern.That question is not 'What does good mean?' but 'What things are good?'

<u>The Sovereignty of Good</u> consists of three essays,all related around a central theme.The first,'The Idea of Perfection',is a genuine philosophical argument.It takes issue with specific points which have been made by other philosophers,specifically Stuart Hampshire,and attempts a refutation of them. The other two,'On God and Good' and 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts',extend the argument of 'The Idea of Perfection' in certain areas but without the same detailed awareness of the work of others.'On God and

Good' is concerned with the secularisation of certain religious concepts, and 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' introduces Plato's myth of the cave to a central place in Iris Murdoch's ethics.

'The Idea of Perfection' takes issue with the course of moral philosophy since G.E.Moore,and specifically with the work of Stuart Hampshire,which is, according to Iris Murdoch

> without commanding universal agreement ,fairly typical and central, and it has the great merit that it states and elaborates what in many modern moral philosophers is simply taken for granted.[56]

She sketches the man of Hampshire's philosophy,who she claims is familiar to us because 'he is the hero of almost every contemporary novel'[57].For him

> Morality is a matter of thinking clearly and then proceeding to outward dealings with other men.
>
> . . . It is not characteristic of the man we are describing,as he appears either in textbooks or in fiction,to possess an elaborate normative vocabulary Modern ethics analyses 'good',the empty action word which is the correlate of the isolated will,and tends to ignore other value terms.Our hero aims at being a 'realist' and regards sincerity as the fundamental and perhaps the only virtue.[58]

Whether or not such a man is the hero 'of every contemporary novel' is perhaps a moot point,but there is little doubt that he is the man who is implied in the pages of Stuart Hampshire's Thought and Action[59].Iris Murdoch feels that something vital is missing from such a picture of man,and she argues her case by presenting what A.S.Byatt calls,interestingly, 'a novel in little'[60].

Iris Murdoch tells a story of a mother-in-law,M,who finds her daughter-in-law,D,common and vulgar.D dies,or goes abroad,so that there is no chance that there can be a change in her behaviour.The point of this is

> to ensure that whatever is in question as happening happens entirely in M's mind.

She goes on to discuss the change that takes place in M's view of D:

> Time passes and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense

of grievance and a fixed picture of D,imprisoned by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl.However,the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person,capable of self-criticism,capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her.M tells herself:'I am old fashioned and conventional.I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded.I may be snobbish.I am certainly jealous.Let me look again.' Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D,until gradually her vision of D alters.If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D's behaviour but in M's mind.D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple,not undignified but spontaneous,not noisy but gay,not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful,and so on.And as I say,ex hypothesi,M's outward behaviour,beautiful from the start,in no way alters.[61]

The point that Iris Murdoch is making here is the telling one that,though there is nothing in a behavioural context to indicate change,there has nonetheless been a change in M's mental state,and that this has been brought about because M has been morally active.It is an Intuitionist position,for if we do not share M's revised opinion of D,then there is nothing that we can do to change our view or to discuss the issue with M. But Iris Murdoch is not an unrevised Intuitionist,and she presents a significant development of G.E.Moore's position in terms of how she would answer that criticism.

She argues that moral behaviour is not simply a matter of acting in the world,but is connected with changes in how we see the world which are brought about as we learn to use the specialized secondary vocabulary of morals.To see that D's behaviour is simple rather than vulgar,she would argue,is not just a matter of changing one's mind.It may be the result of learning the meaning of a new concept.And,she would add,to acquire such new concepts leads to the individual seeing things in a new framework. If these concepts are secondary moral concepts,then they not only contain

a delimitable descriptive content but an evaluative content as well.They tell us how we should behave because to understand the concept of justice, for instance,involves not merely seeing that certain behaviour is in fact more just than other behaviour,but also seeing that it is more desirable because it is more just.If this argument holds good,then Iris Murdoch has managed to show how evaluative statements can be made as the result of describing what is present.In other words,she has managed to show that an 'ought' can be derived from an 'is'.Since Hume claimed that such a step was illegitimate the problem of where the evaluative aspect of moral statements can be adequately derived from has troubled the British empirical tradition.

But there seems little hope that such a move will prove attractive to the philosophical establishment,any more than that it has done so in the past.It seems that,as Guy Openshaw remarks on his death-bed, "A philosopher's thought either suits you or it doesn't."[62] In the case of Iris Murdoch's attempt to show that descriptive evidence can support evaluative conclusions it appears that her thought did not suit the generality of philosophers. Indeed,it made hardly any impact whatever on the philosophical scene.[63] And there is little doubt that in terms of the logical paradigms of philosophical argument her case could be defeated by simply denying that the descriptive content of secondary moral terms had any evaluative content at all.Her case would then collapse,although this seems to be one of those moments when 'one seems to be relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistably impelled to say',as Iris Murdoch remarks in a slightly different context.[64]

As if this difficulty were not sufficient,Iris Murdoch further compounds the problems of her philosophical acceptability by committing herself to the introduction of

> a metaphysical theory,a kind of inconclusive non-dogmatic naturalism, which has the circularity of definition characteristic of such theories.[65]

To attempt to introduce a philosophical case that is presented as 'inconclusive'

and circular seems to court disaster.Further,to admit that the argument is reintroducing naturalism,which was opposed by Moore and is still regarded with hostility by the current philosophical climate,is to make that disaster certain.

However,notwithstanding the fact that she is clearly well aware of the hostility which her views would arouse,Iris Murdoch continues to argue her individual position.Goodness,she claims.is indefinable,but it is connected with knowledge:

> not impersonal quasi-scientific knowledge of the ordinary world, whatever that may be,but with a refined and honest perception of what really is the case,a patient and just discernment and exploration of what confronts one,which is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certainly perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline.[66]

And in this moral doctrine the key term is that of 'attention',a term which she admits she has borrowed from Simone Weil,and which amounts to a 'just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality'.[67] Attention produces a movement towards reality, movement which it is necessarily impossible to complete,but which has the important quality of directing the individual away from his own self to some other external reality.For Iris Murdoch, the great obstacle to moral progress is the ego,the unregenerate psyche which tries to make the world serve its own purpose.She believes that much modern moral philosophy succumbs,at least by implication,to its power,and that the effort to break free from its activities must be considerable even if it is to be successful only in a small way.

'Attention',which she sees as the characteristic of the active moral agent,is the concept which indicates how the individual can break free from the ego.'Attention' reveals that the facts of the case have been ranged under the wrong concept,or that there are facts that have been ignored,or that the perceiver has allowed his ego to intrude.It is not that new things have occured,but,as in the case of M,that the moral agent sees what is there within a different conceptual context:

> Moral tasks are characteristically endless not only because 'within', as it were, a given concept our efforts are imperfect, but also because as we move and as we look our concepts themselves are changing.[68]

This notion of the changing relevance or appropriateness of concepts is one of the key features of Iris Murdoch's philosophy. In order for her to insist on the significance of this aspect of her thought it is necessary that she also stress the importance of the metaphor of vision in her account of moral progress. Coming 'to see' accurately involves taking account of facts which have hitherto been discounted, or changing the value that has been assigned to these facts. One of the strengths of this position is that it corresponds very largely to how we do conduct moral arguments, revaluing some aspects of the case and being persuaded that we should look at certain aspects in a different way.

For Iris Murdoch, however, it is important that in this account of moral progress there should be a hierarchy of value. To return to her central example:

> What M is <u>ex hypothesi</u> attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly or lovingly. Notice the rather different image of freedom which this at once suggests. Freedom is not the sudden jumping of the isolated will in and out of an impersonal logical complex, it is a function of the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly. M's activity is essentially something progressive, something infintely perfectible. So far from claiming for it a sort of infallibility, this new picture has built in the notion of a necessary fallibility. M is engaged in an endless task. As soon as we begin to use words such as 'love' and 'justice' in characterizing M, we introduce into our whole conceptual picture of her situation the idea of progress, that is the idea of perfection: and it is just the presence of this idea which demands an analysis of mental concepts which is different from the genetic one.[69]

The whole movement of this is towards a concept of freedom which is radically different from that offered by Stuart Hampshire and the existentialist-

behaviourist school of ethics.For them 'freedom' is the freedom to choose to do things,the freedom to act as seems appropriate.For Iris Murdoch, freedom is freedom from illusion,freedom from the interference of the ego. To achieve freedom is to be able to perceive reality clearly.It is not attained through decisions and overt actions,but through the slow discipline of attention,the refinement of moral concepts and the expunging of the ego. She suggests that contemporary philosophers have misinterpreted the fact that at the moment of choice there appears to be a kind of blankness.They would claim that this is because at the moment of free choice there are no binding inhibitions on a man.But Iris Murdoch sees freedom as the recognition of value in the world,as obedience to reality.

> One is often compelled almost automatically by what one <u>can</u> see.If we ignore the prior work of attention and notice only the emptiness of the moment of choice we are likely to identify freedom with the outward movement since there is nothing else to identify it with.But if we consider what the work of attention is like,how continuously it goes on,and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round us,we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over.This does not imply that we are not free,certainly not.But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grand leaping about unimpeded at important moments.[70]

In 'On God and Good' she develops the idea of perfection as related to the idea of transcendence.She claims that it is a concept which operates within a particular field of study to provide an increasing sense of direction:

> The idea of perfection is also a natural producer of order.In its <u>light</u> we come to see that A,which superficially resmbles B,is really better than B.And this can occur,indeed must occur,without our having the sovereign idea in any sense 'taped' . . . This is the true sense of the 'indefinability' of the good,which was given a vulgar sense by Moore and his followers.It lies always beyond,and it is from

this beyond that it exercises its <u>authority</u>.[71]

Philosophically speaking,Iris Murdoch,at the very moment she claims that she has stated the true sense of the 'indefinability' of the good,appears to be committing the naturalistic fallacy in defining the good in terms of perfection.It cannot be indefinable and also be perfection.

To see reality and the idea of perfection as transcendent is to attempt a secularization of religious concepts;she wishes to replace the absent God with a non-theological centre which guides moral thought.Iris Murdoch is not trying to reintroduce God in some other form,such as Nature perhaps,but to establish her view that reality exerts the same commanding power in the moral field as God was once thought to hold.[72]Her ethical position is that by giving our attention to reality,that which lies outside the self,and by then acting with obedience to what we see,we should begin to act more morally. This is certainly different from suggesting tnat we should act in a certain way because God either tells us to or desires that we should do so,but it is not always quite clear what she means by the formulation 'obedience to reality'.That there is something outside ourselves may,for the present argument, be taken for granted,although philosophical sceptics would not accept this, but the real problem seems to be exactly how we are to know that we have perceived reality accurately.Iris Murdoch frequently acknowledges the power and activity of the ego which works to defend itself,according to her,from the intrusion of reality into its self-regard.But how we are to recognize when the ego is active and when we see reality unimpaired is not made clear. But the moral battle to see clearly is entirely a matter for man;he is not fought over by supernatural agents.He can be saved by seeing reality clearly or damned because the 'fat,relentless ego'[73] is allowed to dominate,but it is within himself that this secular pilgrimage goes on.

Similarly,Iris Murdoch secularizes the concept of original sin,drawing on the work of Freud,whom she sees as presenting a picture of fallen man:

> Freud takes a thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature.He sees the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy,largely

> determined by its own individual history,whose natural attachments are sexual,ambiguous and hard for the subject to understand or control.Introspection reveals only the deep tissue of ambivalent motive,and fantasy is a stronger force than reason.Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings.[74]

She does not,of course,value psychoanalysis as a means to the good because it characteristically turns the attention inwards to the self rather than outwards to reality.[75] But her use of Freud's fundamental picture of humanity as a secular version of original sin is typical of her attachment to traditional modes of thought while at the same time trying to modify them to suit her view of the contemporary world.She notes,of course,that partially similar views to those of Freud go back to Plato.

In the same way,she wishes to retain the traditions of prayer as a valuable source of spiritual energy by pointing out that it is not,properly speaking,a form of petition,but rather a form of attention which is related to love.It is a form of reflection which

> tends to unify the moral world,and that increasingly reveals increasing unity . . . such a reflection requires and generates a rich and diversified vocabulary for naming aspects of goodness.[76]

Here,at least,she flies in the face of popular assumptions.For prayer,if we should apply the criterion of looking at ordinary language (as a contemporary philosopher would),is thought of as a form of petition.That is how the word is used,and Iris Murdoch seems guilty here of twisting a concept not a little to make it fall in line with her interests.

In general,however,we can say that Iris Murdoch is proposing some kind of naturalistic metaphysical system of thought which takes over many of the traditional concepts of Christianity but removes the deity from them. In terms of its importance for the novelist this position is best articulated in the article 'Existentialists and Mystics' which appeared in the same year (1970) as The Sovereignty of Good .In 'On God and Good',however,she puts the matter thus:

> Morality has always been connected with religion and religion with mysticism.The disappearance of the middle term leaves morality in a situation which is certainly more difficult but essentially the same.The background to morals is properly some kind of mysticism,if by this is meant a non-dogmatic essentially unformulated faith in the reality of the Good,occasionally connected with experience.[77]

The final developments of this theory are presented in 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' which stresses the importance of art in Iris Murdoch's ethics and also connects her view with that of Plato.That she is a Platonist has become increasingly clear as her career has progressed,and it is something which she has acknowledged herself.[78] However,her use of Plato is similar to her use of the concepts of Christianity in that she interprets Plato's central myth of the cave in terms of her own ethical position.And in the case of Plato,the most surprising reinterpretation is the place accorded to art,where,despite Plato's hostility,she manages to make art an aspect of her Platonism.

She follows Plato by seeing beauty as an occasion for 'unselfing',a chance to take delight in the independent existence of others.She also takes art to be a similar opportunity:

> Art,and by 'art' from now on I mean good art,not fantasy art,affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent.

A little later she adds:

> Most of all (art) exhibits to us the connection,in <u>human</u> beings,of clear realistic vision with compassion.The realism of the great artist is not a photographic realism,it is essentially both pity and justice.[79]

The reason that she can claim art to have a place in her Platonic view is her value for the metaphor of vision.Art as a whole is,as she has stated in respect of the novel,concerned with images.Consequently it is linked quite explicitly with her concept of morality as coming to <u>see</u>.Images are particular views of things,ways of presenting an object or situation in

such a way as to enable the onlooker to see aspects that had previously escaped him.Art encourages a view of reality,according to Iris Murdoch, by moving beyond the self and creating an image of the world which is quite clearly other than the individual.For her,realism is nothing to do with 'photographic' realism because the realistic novel (or other work of art) is essentially concerned to portray an image of the moral rather than the social world.[80]

Iris Murdoch regards art and morality as aspects of the same quest,and at its centre there is the central Platonic image:

> One might say that true morality is a sort of un-esoteric mysticism, having its source in an austere and unconsoled love of the Good. When Plato wants to explain Good he uses the image of the sun.The moral pilgrim emerges from the cave and begins to see the real world in the light of the sun,and last of all is able to look at the sun itself.[81]

It is important for Iris Murdoch that the myth of the cave is itself a metaphor for she suggests that metaphor is a concept which has not received due attention from philosophers,and that it is fundamental to the way in which we make linguistic and moral progress.[82]In Plato's myth she finds a metaphor which draws together her own conception of the moral world.The sun is the infinite good,incredibly distant and yet indubitably there.It is the light by which,if we see truly,we see the things of the world,although it is opposed as a source of illumination by the fire,which she sees as the ego.The prisoners in the cave have to make a long upward journey before they are able to escape from the cave,and then spend still more time before they can look at the source of light itself.Her statement of her position has a passion and a determination to convince which show its central place in her thought:

> We cannot then sum up human excellence for these reasons:the world is aimless,chancy,and huge,and we are blinded by self.There is a third consideration which is a relation of the other two.It is difficult to look at the sun:it isnot likelooking at other things . . . It may

be said that since we cannot see anything there why try to look? And is there not a danger of damaging our ability to focus on the sides? I think there is a sense in trying to look, though the occupation is perilous for reasons connected with masochism and other obscure devices of the psyche. The impulse to worship is deep and ambiguous and old. There are false suns, easier to gaze upon and far more comforting than the true one.

Plato has given us the image of this deluded worship in his great allegory. The prisoners in the cave at first face the back wall. Behind them a fire is burning in the light of which they see upon the wall the shadows of puppets which are carried between them and the fire and they take these to be the whole of reality. When they turn round they can see the fire, which they have to pass in order to get out of the cave. The fire, I take it, represents the self, the old unregenerate psyche, that great source of energy and warmth. The prisoners in the second stage of enlightenment have gained the kind of self-awareness which is nowadays a matter of so much interest to us. They can see in themselves the sources of what was formerly blind selfish instinct. They see the flames which threw the shadows which they used to think were real, and they can see the puppets, imitations of things in the real world, whose shadows they used to recognize. They do not yet dream there is anything else to see. What is more likely than that they should settle down beside the fire, which though its form is flickering and unclear is quite easy to look at and cosy to sit by.[83]

Iris Murdoch has, of course, substituted for Plato's sense that philosophy dissolves illusion her own sense of the relationship between the illusion created by the ego and the reality to be seen by the light of the good, but it is worth noting that there is an impressively close fit between her interpretation and the details of the original. It is also worth noting that her eloquence and precision of thought here are drawn out by an <u>image</u>, almost a story, rather than by an analysis. Wherever stories are told, she tells

us,'virtue will be portrayed'[84],and the ease and conviction with which she connects her concept of perfection,the quest for the good and the distractions of the ego with Plato's image is perhaps in itself a demonstration of the particular value of stories in helping us to see.In Men of Ideas she remarked that it was 'more fun to be an artist than a philosopher'[85] but that both were truth revealing activities.But from the drift of her philosophy and from the fact that she has written less of it as she has produced more novels,it would appear that she thinks she can reveal more truth through art than through philosophy.

From 'Against Dryness' to 'Existentialists and Mystics':Considerations of the Novel

Iris Murdoch's considerations of the state of the novel are made in the light of the ethical views discussed above.Her sense that the contemporary novel is not as good as its nineteenth century predecessors is clearly related to her sense that contemporary moral philosophy has taken a wrong turning. For her,both the contemporary novel and contemporary moral philosophy have an inadequate picture of the human soul.Her views are,of course,generalizations which never deal with specific works and rarely mention specific authors,and it is open to doubt whether,in terms of arithmetic totals,her claim that 'Hampshire's Man' is the hero 'of almost every contemporary novel'[86] is exactly true.But there are two things to note about Iris Murdoch's comments in this field.The first is that she has defined,in 'Hampshire's Man',a certain kind of contemporary literary figure which has an untheoretical connexion with existentialist philosophy.The second is that,for Iris Murdoch, there is no doubt about the didactic function of literature.It is for life's sake or it is for nothing.

It is instructive to compare her view with that expressed by Malcolm Bradbury in The Novel Today:

> The novel has always had two reputations - as a relatively innocent affair,an instrument for expressing our pleasure in tale and our

delight in social fact through the one literary language,prose, that we all speak and write;and as a complex verbal invention,in which the ambiguities of narrative,the complexities of structure-making,the problems of making a grammar for experience,the perplexities of creating a sense of truth from falsehood,have been explored.The two reputations have both contested and consorted with each other,and helped to make the novel the very various form it is:a form highly implicated in history,much concerned with representation,yet with an essential bias towards self-questioning and 'reflexiveness'.[87]

Of course,Iris Murdoch also expresses interest in form,and has written at least one novel which is,in Malcolm Bradbury's terms,'reflexive' (The Black Prince).But the primary concern of her work is in neither of the two directions which Bradbury outlines;she is not primarily concerned with either social representation nor with novelistic self-questioning.Her own view is trenchant:

> Art and morals are one:the essence of them both is love.Love is the perception of individuals.Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.Love,and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.[88]

She admits that this statement is both brief and dogmatic,but it is characteristic.The essay ends on the same note:

> Art is for life's sake . . . or it is worthless.[89]

Her fundamental objection to the contemporary novel is the same as her fundamental objection to contemporary moral philosophy;she does not think that they are true,in the sense that they are based upon an inadequate view of the human personality and his relationship with his surroundings.

This view is stated with great force and directness in 'Against Dryness' (1961), subtitled 'A Polemical Sketch'.The essay outlines Iris Murdoch's view of the state of contemporary moral philosophy,drawing attention to the similarities between the Sartrean picture of human consciousness in the

European tradition,and the picture implied by the Anglo-Saxon tradition from Hume through Wittgenstein's Tractatus to Gilbert Ryle and Stuart Hampshire.In sketching the man of this philosophy and the contemporary novel she asks what we have lost:

> We have suffered a general loss of concepts,the loss or a moral and political vocabulary.We no longer use a spread-out substantial picture of the manifold virtues of man and society.We no longer see man against a background of values,of realities,which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world.For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facile idea of sincerity.What we have never had,of course,is a satisfactory Liberal theory of personality,a theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which,as a moral being,he has much to learn.We have bought the Liberal theory as it stands,because we have wished to encourage people to think of themselves as free,at the cost of surrendering the background.[90]

This is essentially a summary of the position which has been outlined above. But linked to the philosophical picture is a picture of what the novel in the twentieth century has also failed to do:

> The 20th-century novel is usually either crystalline or journalistic; that is,it is either a small quasi-allegorical object portraying the human condition and not containing 'characters' in the 19th-century sense,or else it is a large shapeless quasi-documentary object,the degenerate descendant of the 19th-century novel,telling,with pale conventional characters,some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts.[91]

What is clear from this statement is,that although Iris Murdoch looks back with admiration on the nineteenth century novel,she does not simply wish to reintroduce the forms of that novel.What she requires is a novel which provides a sense of real individuals engaged with the moral realities of

the late twentieth century.And this she claims requires a change in our conceptual picture of the moral world:

> We need to return from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth.We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey,but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly tempted to deform by fantasy.Our current picture of freedom encourages a dream-like facility;whereas what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons.We need more concepts in which to picture the substance of our being;it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place.Simone Weil said that morality was a matter of attention, not of will.We need a new vocabulary of attention.
>
> It is here that literature is so important,especially since it has taken over some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy.
>
> Through literature we can rediscover a sense of the density of our lives.Literature can arm us against consolation and fantasy and can help us recover from the ailments of Romanticism.If it can be said to have a task,that surely is its task.[92]

'Against Dryness' provides no answers;what it does is to outline what Iris Murdoch sees as the problem,and to indicate what the role of literature is in solving it.And here there is an answer to the question asked earlier[93], what sense can be made of the idea that Iris Murdoch is a philosophical novelist? She claims here that the novel has taken over 'some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy' and one of those tasks is clearly to extend our conceptual range in order to establish for the age a more satisfactory idea of the personality in relation to the 'rich and complicated world from which he has much to learn'.It can also show us, she would claim,what it is to see reality without the fantasy consolation offered by the ego.It can encourage us to give our attention to the world beyond ourselves.And this can be achieved by providing us with images of

contingent impenetrable human beings.And,as has already been pointed out (see page 5),Iris Murdoch believes that 'we study what is higher first in images'[94].The images of art are a proper preparation for the study of our fellow man,therefore.

In 'Existentialists and Mystics - A Note on the Novel in the New Utilitarian Age' (1970),Iris Murdoch returns to the subject which she raised in 'Against Dryness',but with a more positive approach in that she makes some clear suggestions about how the conceptual gap that she identified might be filled.It is surprising that this essay has not received more attention,for the dichotomy of the title provides a more useful tool by which to tackle her work than does the journalistic/crystalline distinction of'Against Dryness'.Neither of the two most recent studies of Iris Murdoch's work (Elizabeth Dipple's Work for the Spirit (1982) and Richard Todd's Iris Murdoch:The Shakesperean Interest (1979)) makes any mention of the article, nor do they include it in their bibliographies.This is a pity,for its omission seriously distorts Elizabeth Dipple's argument.'Existentialists and Mystics' does what 'Against Dryness' failed to do:it offers a conceptual base by which to distinguish the two kinds of novels indicated in its title.That base is, not surprisingly,set in terms of the essays in The Sovereignty of Good.

> I propose to distinguish between what I shall call 'the existentialist novel' and 'the mystical novel'.(I use the word 'existentialist' in a broad atmospheric sense.)The existentialist novel shows us freedom and virtue as the assertion of the will.The mystical novel shows us freedom and virtue as understanding,as obedience to the Good.[95]

And it should come as no surprise to find 'Hampshire's Man' lurking within the existentialist novel,that 'document of this anxious modern consciousness':

> We know this novel and its hero well.The story of the lonely brave man,defiant without optimism,proud without pretention,always an exposer of shams,whose mode of being is a deep criticism of society. He is an adventurer.He is godless.He does not suffer from guilt.He thinks of himself as free.He may have faults,he may be self-assertive or even violent,but he has sincerity and courage,and for this we

> forgive him.[96]

And she instances the work of Lawrence,Hemingway,Sartre,Camus and Kingsley Amis as examples of the type.These writers may not have much in common in terms of style,but in terms of the concept through which Iris Murdoch is approaching their fiction they do have a certain consistency in that for all of them the world opposes the consciousness of their heroes in a manner which is similar to the position argued by Jean-Paul Sartre in L'Etre et le Néant[97]. They themselves are the measure of their own morality;there is no transcendent reality.

If,as she claims,the existentialist novel equates man with god,the mystical novel,which she sees as developing after the first category,is a second thought about that.

> The mystical novel is both newer and more old-fashioned.What is characteristic of this novel is that it keeps in being,by one means or another,the conception of God.Man is still pictured as being divided, but divided in a new way,between a fallen nature and a spiritual world.[98]

And she instances Graham Greene,Muriel Spark,and William Golding as novelists of this type.The notable absentee from the list is,of course,Iris Murdoch herself.As has been seen in the discussion of her ethical point of view she is indeed concerned to keep much of traditional religious consciouness in being although in a completely secular way.She certainly sees the world as 'spiritual' in a way that the existentialist novelists do not,but is adamant that God is no longer a feasible concept with which to fill the top of the moral pyramid.We must therefore,reject any idea that Iris Murdoch is a religious writer.[99]

But the label of 'mystical novelist' fits very well.Her constant concern with moral perception,and with the transcendent reality which can be revealed by 'attention' and which exerts a command upon the moral sensibility is a mystical attitude,although of a non-theological,non-dogmatic nature.

In any event she distinguishes mysticism from religion,for mystics,she

claims,have to invent their own imagery 'in an empty situation'[100], attempting to express a religious consciousness when the certainties of religious belief have disappeared.The OED gives 'mysticism' as 'belief in the possibility of union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation'.If the divinity is removed from that definition and Iris Murdoch's conception of 'reality' substituted for it,then we can see what she means when she says:

> The mystical novelists,even when they rejected the idea of God, retained images of lofty structure,an unachieved area of real good, making positive spiritual demands on the human soul.[101]

In her own novels,this 'lofty structure' is a transcendent awareness of of the reality beyond the self.It is found in the everyday world,in natural things and in great art.The demands made by these aspects of goodness lead Iris Murdoch to speculate upon the relationship between ethical thinking and politics,a relationship which has developed in the absence of such a relationship between ethics and religion in her opinion.This new form of utilitarianism,a 'more fundamental thinking about a proper quality of human life,which begins at the food and shelter level'[102], is an 'untheory' which says

> that human good is something which lies in the foreground of life and not in the background.It is not a flickering of will-power, nor a citadel of esoteric virtue,but a good quality of human life: and we know,naturally,where to begin thinking about this.[103]

Here Iris Murdoch is frank about her philosophical naturalism.She claims that an argument which considers what men want is not an improper place from which to start a consideration of what their duties are,and that

> Because human beings are what they are and have the needs which they do have,freedom,democracy,truth and love are important.[104]

The mysticism which she is advocating here is that which finds the distant, unapproachable good to be inherent in the things which are near at hand.In the novels,and this is an indication of why she values novels as ways to the truth,moral development and awareness often stem from a contact with

what happens to be there.

The distinction of the title of this essay provides us with more than a convenient label for Iris Murdoch's own private literary history.It also provides a much-needed term to describe her work,particularly her later work, although much of the earlier work has elements of the later in it.It makes good sense to describe her work as increasingly 'mystical' according to her own definition.It also develops the idea of the novel's task as expressed in 'Against Dryness' in that the mysticism which she outlines here must extend the conceptual range of a novel's readers as it strives to find new imagery for the religious consciousness in a non-religious age.Despite the neglect that the article has suffered,the terms which it provides enable criticism of Iris Murdoch's own work to be made in more precise terminology than would be the case without it.

Platonism and a Value for Art

The main burden of The Fire and the Sun (1978) is an attempt to reconcile Plato's thought with his notorious hostility to art,which he believed expressed the lowest and most irrational kind of human awareness.[105] He objected to literature because it portrayed the Gods in undignified positions and also represented bad men.Plato's approach to literature is literal minded, for it fails to see that literature is distinct from life.He fails to recognize the place of creativity in art,seeing it as a straightforward kind of imitation.It is this limitation in his argument which enables Iris Murdoch to attempt a reconciliation of apparently implacably opposed views. She claims that

> art transforms,is creation rather than imitation,as Plato's own praise of the 'divine frenzy' must imply.[106]

She links the idea that art is creation with Plato's own creation myth as found in Timaeus and with her own conception of the good:

> The rational and good Demiurge creates the cosmos and endows it with a discerning soul.He works as well as he can,gazing at a

perfect model (the Forms),to create a changing sensible copy of an unchanging intelligible original.[107]

And:

The Forms represent the absolute and gratuitous nature of the moral demand . . . The mythical Demiurge creates because active mind must move . . . and he is moved by love for the Forms to attempt to imitate them in another medium.Like the mortal artist he fails,both because the other medium cannot reproduce the original,and because the material resists his conceptions and his powers.[108]

She sees the Demiurge in Timaeus as Plato's portait of the artist[109],and the presentation which she gives him makes clear the parallels between her ethical views and her views on art.She sees the activity of the artist as an aspect of love,or attention,and she equates this with the figure of Eros in Plato:

Eros is the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels of the soul and through which we are able to turn towards reality.[110]

It is this force which leads us to appreciate the beautiful in nature and to fall in love,both of which are steps on the road to the Good.Here she follows Plato most precisely,for Socrates in the Symposium,when he relates what he has learned from Diotima,makes the same claim.[111]. However,Iris Murdoch is concealing an important point by equating Eros with the activity of the artist.As Plato presents the force of Eros,and as it is seen in Diotima's reported speech,it is concerned with beautiful bodies and not with works of art.And the 'science of beauty' of which Socrates speaks would specifically exclude art.It is true that Iris Murdoch acknowledges Plato's hostility to art,but she plays down the basis of this hostility to present an account of Eros which is at variance with Plato's intention.

But for Iris Murdoch art is an agent in the moral struggle,and an active encouragement to break free from the fantasies of the ego. It is unique in the moral world in that it possess these qualities for both those who create works of art,and for those who read,or look at,or listen to them.If an artist is to produce good art then it is necessary that he rids himself of the ego. This is a matter of definition, for

in Iris Murdoch's view,good art must necessarily be selfless.The perceiver of art has a more easily achieved activity,although of the same type.To see art properly means,for Iris Murdoch,to perceive a distinct thing beyond the self.Art,for her,is an image of the world in that it encourages our response to reality and our afforts to struggle free from the limitations of the ego.It is in that sense a preparation for the greater moral task of seeing the world itself.But for the artist,as opposed to the perceivers of art,art,she thinks,is an opportunity to perceive,and to reveal that perception to others.

> Strong agile realism,which is of course not photographic naturalism, the non-sentimental,non-meanly-personal imaginative grasp of the subject matter is something which can be recognized as value in all the arts,and it is this which gives that special unillusioned pleasure which is the liberating whiff of reality;when in high free play the clarified imaginative attention of the creative mind is fixed upon its object.Of course art is playful,but its play is serious . . . Freud says that the opposite of play is not work but reality.This may be true of fantasy play but not of the playfulness of good art which delightedly seeks and reveals the real.Thus in practice we increasingly relate one concept to another,and we see beauty as the artful use of form to illuminate truth,and celebrate reality;and we can then experince what Plato spoke of but wished to separate from art:the way in which to desire the beautiful is to desire the real and the good.[112]

Iris Murdoch manages her reconciliation between Platonic thought and a value for art by virtue of a different meaning of truth,as is shown in this passage.Plato clearly objects to art because of its imitative qualities,and because that representation imitates what is already a shadow of reality,in that art imitates the world which is a shadow of the Forms.Iris Murdoch states that realism is not 'photographic naturalism', and hence is not the same kind of imitation which is Plato's concern.She claims that realism reveals truth by relating one concept to another

in what must be seen as a creative rather than a merely imitative manner. It is also the case that her idea of realism is conceptual rather than simply concerned with presenting images of the external world.Essentially she is arguing that art is a form of knowledge and it is this which helps her to reconcile a value for art with Platonism.It is,however,doubtful whether such a manoeuvre would satisfy Plato.

The Seriousness of 'Play'

The most significant claim that Iris Murdoch makes about the nature of art in The Fire and the Sun is the claim that art is 'playful,but its play is serious'.These remarks received greater attention and elaboration in her interview with Bryan Magee in the television series Men of Ideas.[113] This interview,conducted by another philosopher,attempted to establish the 'areas where philosophy and literature overlap',[114] according to Magee, but Iris Murdoch tried to draw a much more definite line between the activities of literature and philosophy.This line depended on the distinction noted earlier[115] between philosophy as analysis,and literature as 'mystification'.The central part of Iris Murdoch's argument here is that art reflects the contingency of the world in a way which the analysis of philosophy cannot:

> The working artist confronts,and may glory in,a lot of unintelligible random stuff;and perhaps great artists only seem to 'explain the world',though they do explain parts of it . . . Art is not all that intelligible.[116]

What she means here is that art,and specifically literature,has no need to produce logical arguments about the world.Indeed,such arguments would be counter to the very nature of art,according to her.But the connexion between art and philosophy does receive some attention from her in the same vein:

> Of course writers are influenced by the ideas of their time and may

> be interested in philosophical change,but the amount of philosophy they succeed in expressing is likely to be small.I think as soon as philosophy gets into a work of literature it becomes the plaything of the writer.[117]

This kind of semi-derogatory usage of the idea of play appears in Iris Murdoch's earlier comments on the nature of art.In her interview with Frank Kermode she claims that Under the Net 'plays' with a philosophical idea and that certain incidents that Kermode refers to as ' technical excursions' are 'pure play'.[118]But the derogation is inconsistent with the high value put on 'play' in the later work.It is possible to say that the fifteen years which elapsed between 'The House of Fiction' interview, first published in 1963,and The Fire and the Sun (1978) simply saw a change in Iris Murdoch's views about this matter.It may be that this is an example of the way in which her concepts have changed as she has given the facts which she has ranged under them more consideration.Or it may be that the sense that her remarks about 'play' are derogatory in the earlier articles is mistaken.There is not sufficient evidence to come to a firm decision here. But what we can be certain of is the attitude to 'play' expressed in her later work,and this is clearly related to her ethical thinking.

In The Sovereignty of Good she quotes Wittgenstein:

> Not how the world is,but that it is,is the mystical.[119]

Her delight in the world as an external reality,an existence which by its existence has much to teach the all-too-frequently egoistical self,is manifest in both her ethical writing and also in her novels,which present a world which is detailed and curious,but which stakes very little on its social realism but a great deal on presenting a world which demands to be noticed.[120]Those characters who can give their attention to the world which surrounds them are those who are capable of moral progress through moving out of the limitations of the self to see what is really there.The extensive descriptions in Iris Murdoch's novels of the world which the characters inhabit are aspects of the creative imagination in 'high free play'

revealing the reality which lies beyond individual fantasy.

The use of the term 'play',despite its associations with frivolity, is a deliberate and serious one in the later work.What is meant by the term is something nearer to 'imaginative exploration' which does not become solemn,and is always prepared to allow an all-round view of an event,and can see the absurdity of a character's involvement,at the same time as taking it seriously.It tends to value accidentalness,where events and things escape from the control,or attempted control,of individuals and assert their brute reality.They are there,and must be acknowledged as independent parts of the world.Here we can see the fundamental difference between Iris Murdoch and Sartre,for what is a horrifying involvement with contingency for him,becomes for her a matter of delight rather than disgust. Indeed,it is an essential aspect of the development of the 'mystical' novel that an awareness of the significance of the world as something beyond the self should be attempted,and that this world should be seen to exercise its authority powerfully and yet mysteriously.

In all Iris Murdoch's novels the playful is present.In Under the Net it can be seen in the carefully intense description of the Mime Theatre and its contingent components;in The Philosopher's Pupil it is there in the almost pointless ramifications of the plot,in which characters of no significance to the main action are introduced and set against the more determined fate of the central figures.'Play' reveals the real because it draws attention to the external world,and by so doing enables the perceivers of that world to develop their conceptual range through learning to use secondary moral terms with greater accuracy.[121] It thus serves what Iris Murdoch sees as the moral function of art,in that it encourages the growth of perception and attention and thought about moral issues.

The Scope of the Thesis

This thesis examines Iris Murdoch's novels is terms of the development of her ideas as outlined above.It is not concerned with questions of form where these do not relate to the ideas contained in the novels,nor is it concerned to establish the relative success and failure of individual works.

It treats Iris Murdoch's novels as falling into three periods which reflect developments in her ideas,and which to some extent can be marked by the appearance of the two essays 'Against Dryness' (1961) and 'Existentialists and Mystics' (1970).The novels between Under the Net (1954) and A Severed Head (1961) are regarded as early novels;those from An Unofficial Rose (1962) to An Accidental Man (1971) as belonging to a middle period,and the novels which follow,from The Black Prince (1973) to the present,as later work.Such broad categories inevitably blur some distinctions,particularly in the middle period where Iris Murdoch's ideas are in transition,and there is some uncertainty of form in these works which reflects this.

The later novels can be described as 'mystical novels' in that they present an awareness of the transcendent nature of reality as the key to moral progress,and progressively show the maintenance of a spiritual dimension in the world in the absence of God.This is a mystical attitude, but it also Platonic,for it depends upon the central Platonic equation of love with knowledge.Although the 'mystical novel' and Iris Murdoch's Platonism belong to her later period,the thesis argues that many of the characteristic ideas of the later work can be found in unfinished form in the very earliest work.

NOTES

1.See Bernard Bergonzi,The Situation of the Novel (London ,1972),pp 47-49.

2.See Robert Scholes,Fabulation and Metafiction (Chicago and London,1979), pp 56-74,and A.S.Byatt,Iris Murdoch,Writers and their Work (Harlow,1976),p 35.

3.Elizabeth Dipple,Iris Murdoch:Work for the Spirit (London,1982),p xi.

4.Dipple,p 347.

5.Work for the Spirit and Richard Todd,Iris Murdoch;The Shakespearian Interest (London,1979).

6.See Patrick Swinden,Unofficial Selves:Character in the Novel from Dickens to the Present Day (London,1973),p 232.

7.Iris Murdoch,'Against Dryness:A Polemical Sketch',Encounter,16 (January 1961),pp 16-20 (p 18).

8.Iris Murdoch,Sartre;Romantic Rationalist,(Brighton and New York,1980). First published in Cambridge,1953.

9.Iris Murdoch,The Fire and the Sun:Why Plato Banished the Artists (Oxford, 1977).

10.See Iris Murdoch,'The Sublime and the Good',Chicago Review 13 (Autumn 1959),42-55 (p 53) and 'Existentialists and Mystics:A Note on the Novel in the New Utilitarian Age',in Essays and Poems Presented to Lord David Cecil edited by W.W.Robson (London,1970) pp 169-183 (p 173).

11.See Graham Martin,'Iris Murdoch and the Symbolist Novel',British Journal of Aesthetics,5 (July 1965),296-300.
He remarks that her general comments on the novel 'connect it,not with literary tradition,but with the history of philosophy'. (p 297)

12.Sartre (p 75).Note that in Nuns and Soldiers Anne Cavidge,who has been reading novels after coming out of the convent,is amazed that they contain 'so much heterogeneous stuff'. (p 53)

13.See Bryan Magee,'Iris Murdoch on Natural Novelists and Unnatural Philosophers',Listener 27 April 1978 533-535 (p 534).
See also 'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch',Literary Review (April 1983),31-35 (p 31) where she expresses much the same view.

14.Rubin Rabinovitz,Iris Murdoch,Columbia Essays on Modern Writers,(New York,, 1968) p 45.

15.Bryan Magee and others,Men of Ideas:Some Creators of Modern Philosophy (London,1978) p 277.

16.Men of Ideas p 264.

17.Men of Ideas p 265 .

18.A.S.Byatt,Degrees of Freedom:The Novels of Iris Murdoch (London,1965) p 181:'To make the effort to understand her thought,to find the statement of the abstract ideas behind her novels is in a sense the best way to come at them.'

19.Men of Ideas p 269.

20.The Fire and the Sun,p 1. She is quoting Plato,The Republic,607B.

21.Men of Ideas,p 266.

22.Iris Murdoch,The Sovereignty of Good (London,1970).This volume consists of three previously published papers:'The Idea of Perfection',Yale Review 1964;'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts',which was the Leslie Stephen lecture for 1967;'On "God" and "Good"',The Anatomy of Knowledge edited by Marjorie Grene (London 1969).

23.The Fire and the Sun,p 41.

24.The Sovereignty of Good,p79.

25.Review of A Fairly Honourable Defeat,London Magazine,10 (April 1970) p 102: 'Iris Murdoch is not,it seems to me,a philosophical novelist in the sense of someone pressing on from the observed facts towards general statements about the world.It is rather that she looks at people's feelings in a philosophical and not the more common psychological way.In their aspirations people affirm what they think is the true nature of the world;they also do this in their lack of aspiration.'

26.The Fire and the Sun,p 83.

27.The Sovereignty of Good,p 1.

28.Bryan Magee and others,Modern British Philosophy,(London,1971).

29.Modern British Philosophy,p 150.

30.G.E.Moore,Principia Ethica,(Cambridge,1903),p 10.

31.Theories of Ethics,edited by Phillipa Foot,(Oxford,1967) p 2.

32.A.J.Ayer,Language,Truth and Logic,(London,1936).

33.C.L.Stevenson,Ethics and Language,(New Haven and London,1945).

34.Mary Warnock,Ethics Since 1900,(Oxford,1960) p 96.

35.R.M.Hare,The Language of Morals,(Oxford,1952) and Freedom and Reason, (Oxford,1963).

36.Theories of Ethics,p 7.

37.For a more thorough treatment of this subject,see:
Theories of Ethics.
Ethics since 1900.
G.J.Warnock,Contemporary Moral Philosophy,(London and Basingstoke,1967).
A.Montefiore,A Modern Introduction to Moral Philosophy,(London,1958).

38.Gilbert Ryle,The Concept of Mind,(London,1949).

39.The Concept of Mind,p 15.

40.The Concept of Mind,p 11.

41.The Concept of Mind,p 25.

42.See Stuart Hampshire,Thought and Action,(London,1959) Chapter One.

43.Thought and Action,p 252.

44.See The Sovereignty of Good,pp 4-9,and **Iris Murdoch**,'The Darkness of Practical Reason',Encounter, 27,(July 1966),46-50.

45.See W.K.Rose,'Iris Murdoch Informally',London Magazine,8,(June 1968) 59-73 (pp 68-69).

46.Iris Murdoch,'The Novelist as Metaphysician',Listener,16 March 1950, pp 473,476,and 'The Existentialist Hero',Listener,23 March 1950,pp 523-524.

47.'The Novelist as Metaphysician' p 473.

48.**'The Existentialist Hero' p523.**

49.See Men of Ideas,p 277.Quoted above p 3.

50.Sartre, pp 49-50.

51.Sartre,p 51.

52.The Sovereignty of Good,p 1.See above p 6.

53.The Sovereignty of Good,p 4.

54.Sartre,p 35.

55.Theories of Ethics,p12.'Geach' is the author of 'Good and Evil' which is reprinted in this volume.

56.The Sovereignty of Good,p 4.

57.The Sovereignty of Good,p 7.

58.The Sovereignty of Good,p 8.

59.See Thought and Action,pp 177-178: 'A sincere declaration of intentions is the most reliable of all sources of information about a man's future action,if he is a free agent,which entails that he is not at the mercy of forces that he does not himself recognize and that are outside his control.This is a necessary truth.'

60.A.S.Byatt,Iris Murdoch,p 15.

61.The Sovereignty of Good,pp 17-18.

62.Nuns and Soldiers,p 2.

63.There are no reviews of The Sovereignty of Good in the following philosophical journals:Ethics,Philosophy (though received),Journal of Philosophy (received),Metaphilosophy (received),Mind,The Monist,New Scholasticism,Philosophical Review,Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,Philosophy East and West,Ratio (received) and Review of Metaphysics.

The only favourable comment seems to be Antony Kenny's in the Listener,7 January 1971,p 23: 'Miss Murdoch's papers cast an unfamiliar and revealing light on fashionable doctrines and presuppositions.'

64.The Sovereignty of Good,p 21.

65.The Sovereignty of Good,p 44.

66.The Sovereignty of Good,p 38.

67. The Sovereignty of Good, p 34.

68. The Sovereignty of Good, p28.

69. The Sovereignty of Good, p 23.

70. The Sovereignty of Good, p 37.

71. The Sovereignty of Good, p 62.

72. See also 'Existentialists and Mystics' pp 173-174.

73. The Sovereignty of Good, p52.

74. The Sovereignty of Good, p51.

75. For instance, see the satiric portrait of the psychoanalyst Palmer Anderson in A Severed Head, where he is refered to as 'that fashionable kind of modern magician'. (p 24).

76. The Sovereignty of Good, pp 57-58.

77. The Sovereignty of Good, p 74.

78. W.K.Rose, 'Iris Murdoch Informally', pp 68-69. See above p 10.

79. The Sovereignty of Good, pp 85, 87.

80. J.P.Stern, On Realism, (London 1973) comments favourably on The Sovereignty of Good, quoting with approval the remark above (p 23, note 79). He writes: 'we shall have no difficulty in acknowledging the reference to 'pity and justice' as one of the many legitimate attempts to elucidate the true nature of the term (realism), its dovetailing involvement in literature and life.' (pp 57-58).

81. The Sovereignty of Good, p 92. The myth of the cave is in The Republic, translated by B.Jowett, in The Dialogues of Plato, Vol 2 , 4th edition, (Oxford, 1953) pp 376-384.

82. See Margaret Weldhen, 'Morality and the Metaphor', New Universities Quarterly, 34 (Spring 1980), 215-228. This is a rare example of a philosopher who finds value in Iris Murdoch's work.

83. The Sovereignty of Good, pp 100-101.

84. 'Existentialists and Mystics', p 181: 'And if stories are told, virtue will be portrayed, even if the old philosophies have gone away.'

85. Men of Ideas, p 269.

86. The Sovereignty of Good, p 7. The philosophical aspects of this are dealt with at p 15 above.

87. Malcolm Bradbury, 'Introduction' to The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction (London and Manchester, 1977), p 8.

88. 'The Sublime and the Good', p 51.

89. 'The Sublime and the Good', p 55.

90. 'Against Dryness', p 18.

91.'Against Dryness',p 18.The idea of the 'human condition' also appears in John Bayley The Characters of Love:A Study in the Literature of Personality (London,1960),pp 268-269.

92.'Against Dryness' p 20.

93.See above,p 3.

94.The Fire and the Sun ,p 41.

95.'Existentialits and Mystics' p 171.

96.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 173.

97.Jean-Paul Sartre,L'Etre et le Néant,translated by Hazel E.Barnes (as Being and Nothingness),London 1958,p 555:
'Thus,totally free,undistinguishable from the period for which I have chosen to be the meaning,as profoundly responsible for the war as if I had myself declared it,unable to live without integrating it into my situation,engaging myself wholly in it and stamping it with my seal, I must be without remorse or regrets as I am without excuse;from the moment of my upsurge into **being**,I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anything or any person being able to lighten it.'

98.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 173.

99.As claimed by Elizabeth Dipple,p 62:
'It is just to call Murdoch a religious writer in a way that past traditions of our culture would recognize,but whereas Chaucer or Spenser or Richardson or George Eliot knew that they were placing their theologically inclined characters against an accessible background, obviously none is generally available now,and the task of the religious writer is to describe what we have and to point in a certain direction.'

100.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 174.

101.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 178.

102.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 179.

103.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 180.

104.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 180.It is worth noting here that her use of the term 'freedom' is in a political and not a moral context.

105.The Dialogues of Plato,Volume Two,The Republic,translated by B.Jowett, 4 volumes,4th edition (Oxford,1953),Books 3 and 10.

106.The Fire and the Sun,p 7.See also Lorna Sage,'No Trespassers',New Review,14 (Sept.1977),pp 49-50
She remarks that Plato opts out of the tradition of regarding poetic myth as neither true nor false.

107!The Fire and the Sun',pp 49-50.

108.'The Fire and the Sun',p 52.

109.See Bernard Williams,'The Nice and the Good',New Statesman 5 August 1977,pp 182-183. He suggests that Iris Murdoch has seriously misinterpreted Plato.He proposes that if we accept
'a conception of the good as something external to the 'greedy' ego (as Miss Murdoch often calls it),something inherent in a hard

order of reality . . . What will we or she say to the claim - a pressing one,after all - that there is no such order of things,that what she would have us yearn for is not there? This is an embarrassment which has been latent in other of Miss Murdoch's writings,and not solely in her philosophy.'
(P 183)

Her account of the Timaeus leaves several issues unclear,but these points are less important than her argument as a whole which is convincing provided that one is prepared,as Professor Williams is not,to accept her fundamental metaphysic.There is the problem,however,which she never really tackles,of the relation between 'creativity' and 'imitation',terms which she sometimes uses as nearly synonomous - as in her account of the Demiurge's activity.Is it enough to suggest that activity becomes creative when it attempts to imitate something in another form? That would seem to be the whole of her case for the artist as a creative being. She also uses the term 'transforms' to describe what art does,which seems to imply the same kind of cross between creation and imitation.

110.The Fire and the Sun,p 34.

111.The Symposium,in Jowett,volume 1,pp 541-542:
'For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to seek the company of corporeal beauty;and first,if he be guided by his instructor aright,to love one beautiful body only - out of that he should create fair thoughts;and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one body is akin to the beauty of another;and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit,how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every body is one and the same.And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one,which he will despise and deem a small thing,and will become a steadfast lover of all beautiful bodies.In the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the soul is more precious than the beauty of the outward form . . . drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty,he will create many fair and noble thoughts and discourses in boundless love of wisdom,until on that shore he grows and waxes strong,and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science,which is the science of beauty everywhere.'

112.The Fire and the Sun,p 84.

113.Transcripts of this appeared both in 'Iris Murdoch on natural novelists and unnatural philosophers' and in Men of Ideas.

114.'Natural novelists and unnatural philosophers', p 533.

115.See above p4.

116.Men of Ideas p 273.

117.Men of Ideas p 276.

118.Frank Kermode,'The House of Fiction:Interviews with Seven Novelists', Partisan Review,30,(Spring 1963),61-82,(pp 64-65).

119.The Sovereignty of Good,p 85.The quotation is from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,translated by D.F.Pears and B.F. McGuinness,(London,1961),p 149.(First German edition,1921.)

120.Compare the following passage from Magaret Drabble's The Needle's Eye, (London,1972),with a passage from Iris Murdoch's A Fairly Honourable Defeat (London,1970).

'It reminded him,this room,of his grandmother's house.The tea-cosy, the bundle of knitting,the ticking clock,the armchairs,the round tin tray,they were all objects he had not seen for years,and here they all were,well worn,well used,lived with.He could not have said why the similarity,or rather the perception and recognition of it,so pleased him,as he had never cared for his grandmother's house after very early infancy:he had found it cramped,oppressive,smelling of cats and bad cooking,and too full of deadly whiskery unfeeling menacing embraces.'
(The Needle's Eye,Penguin p 45.)

'Hilda inspected the kitchen.It looked much as usual.The familiar group of **empty beer** bottles growing cobwebs.About twenty unwashed milk bottles yellow with varying quantities of sour milk.A sagging wickerwork chair and two upright chairs with very slippery grey upholstered seats.The window,which gave onto a brick wall,was spotty with grime,admitting light but concealing the weather and the time of day.' (A Fairly Honourable Defeat,p 55.)

The point here is that the first stakes much on its social accuracy, indeed,the characters place themselves primarily by reference to social position and social changes.The Iris Murdoch passage simply lacks this interest in things as the indicators of social progress and change.In the longer run of the novel,Tallis Browne's dirty kitchen comes to represent an aspect of his unwillingness to impose himself on the world.Thus,though rather curiously perhaps,unwashed milk bottles suggest positive moral qualities.

121.See pp 16-17 above .

CHAPTER ONE:UNDER THE NET

Under the Net (1954) is not only the most overtly concerned with philosophy of all Iris Murdoch's novels,it is also the novel about which she made the remark about 'play'.[1] Since the issue is at its most explicit here it is in order to look at the kinds of image which this 'play' produces and at the relationship of these images to the specific philosophical concerns.Under the Net actually has some formal philosophical discussion in it although it is not very extensive.It consists of a fragment of Jake's book The Silencer,a dialogue written after he has met Hugo Belfounder in a cold cure research establishment and based on their discussions.The most significant part of the fragment is as follows:

> Tamarus: But life has to be lived,and to be lived it has to be understood.This process is called civilization.What you say goes against our very nature.We are rational animals in the sense of theory-making animals.
>
> Annandine: When you've been most warmly involved in life,when you've most felt yourself to be a man,has a theory ever helped you? Is it not then that you meet with things themselves naked? Has a theory ever helped you when you were in doubt what to do? Are not these very simple moments when theories are shilly-shallying? And don't you realize this very clearly at such moments?
>
> Tamarus: My answer is twofold.Firstly that I may not reflect upon theories,but I may be expressing one all the same.Secondly that there are theories abroad in the world,political ones for instance,and so we have to deal with them in our thoughts,and that at moments of decision too.
>
> Annandine: If by expressing a theory you mean that someone else could make a theory about what you do,of course that is true and uninteresting.What I speak of is the real decision as we experience it;and here the movement away from theory and generality is the movement towards truth.All theorizing is flight.We must be ruled

by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular. Indeed it is something to which we can never get close enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl under the net . . .
It is true that theories may often be part of a situation that one has to contend with. But then all sorts of obvious lies and fantasies may be a part of such a situation; and you would say that one must be good at detecting and shunning lies, and not that one must be good at lying.[2]

Of course, the novel is not analysing this position in any formal or philosophical way, although it does provide images of the relationship of theory and event. There are, however, some points which can be made. Firstly, that the discussion is in terms of 'theories' in The Silencer, whereas Iris Murdoch in The Idea of Perfection uses the term 'concepts'. Secondly, Jake notices that the position of Tamarus (his own views dressed up for the dialogue) is stronger than he had previously thought; he notes that he must have been 'bemused' by Hugo. Thirdly, Annandine does not actually answer Tamarus's first point; what he does is to assert his own theory that there should be no theories. He fails to deal with the substantive point about the nature of moral decisions, which is, of course, a point about the value of concepts and the way in which we 'see'. Annandine seems to be proposing a view which has affinities with the existentialist moments of freedom recommended by Sartre, when the free individual must choose without criteria in his freedom. It suffers from the same problem: how are we to distinguish the significance of one choice from another? A conceptual background, or a theory, is necessary in order to see that one choice is of greater moral importance than another. And just as Iris Murdoch herself has said that the existential hero is a figure of fascination, so Jake has been fascinated by Hugo.[3] But that Hugo finally withdraws from the world to be a watchmaker in Nottingham suggests that his views do not provide a satisfactory engagement with the moral world, which is, after all, to do with people and not intricate machines.

Annandine's attention to the particular,his wish to isolate each experience within its own immediacy inevitably prevents the development of conceptual connection which is necessary for the growth of a specialized secondary moral vocabulary.Without concepts we cannot see that D's vulgar behaviour is in fact 'refreshingly simple',and a concept is essentially a small-scale theory.[4]

In fact it is Tamarus who is nearest to Iris Murdoch's own view that at moments of decision there is no need for reflection as we act in accordance with the concepts which we have learnt.[5]Concepts help us to crawl under the net and approach the real world because they enable us to see similarities and differences which might otherwise escape us.

Of course,Annandine talks of 'theories',not 'concepts',although Iris Murdoch seems to use the terms as almost synonomous when she writes of 'conceptualizing and theorizing' as both likely to remove one from the object of contemplation.[6]But the really important distinction is between 'conceptualizing and theorizing' which precedes attention to the individual facts,and the use of theory or concepts to link facts which have been accurately perceived as individual and separate.Hence Patrick Swinden's claim that only

> by eschewing the need for concepts,is it possible to come into contact with that dense aggregate of particularities which makes up the mysterious identity of the things that are in the world, including individual persons[7]

is innacurate.In Under the Net it is the failure to use concepts properly that is the cause of the trouble.We see various individuals in the grip of theories which prevent them from seeing accurately,but this does not completely discredit all theory.

For us,the position is complicated by the fact that we see Anna,Lefty and Hugo,who are all in the grip of theories,through the eyes of a man who is in the grip of his own,that 'everything in my life (should) have a sufficient reason'(p 26).But Jake's obsession with himself gradually yields to the pressure of events.He finds that he is being distorted in the minds

of others so that he will fit their various conceptualizations;Anna fails to respond to him because he does not fit her theory of the value of silence: Lefty wants him to become a member of the left wing revolutionary movement. Jake becomes annoyed by this desire to categorize him:

> I was beginning to be annoyed by this question and answer method.He asked each question as if there was one precise answer to it.It was like the catechism.(p 111)

Lefty's political point of view is a good example of the dangers of theorizing;his political views may not differ all that much from Jake's, but Jake does not have the all-embracing theory which Lefty has.Consequently, Lefty is cut off from Jake as an individual by his desire to use him for the advancement of his political purpose.

At times,characters can respond to each other as distinct and individual centres of being,despite the intrusion of their theories.But such breakthroughs can only be achieved in unusual circumstances which breach the defences of theory.So Jake,by throwing Anna to the floor with a judo throw can enable her to relax in mutual recognition before she is engulfed again by her theory (pp 44-45).

A more extensive example of the way in which the characters can break the grip of theory and confront each other as individuals occurs at the end of the London pubcrawl,when Jake,Lefty and Finn swim in the Thames, watched by Dave.

> The sky opened out above me like an unfurled banner,cascading with stars and blanched by the moon . . . I swam well out into the river. It seemed enormously wide;and as I looked up and down stream I could see on one side the dark pools under Blackfriar's Bridge, and on the other the pillars of Southwark Bridge glistening under the moon.The whole expanse of water was running with light.It was like swimming in quicksilver.I looked about for Finn and Lefty,and soon saw their heads bobbing not far away.They came towards me and for a while we swam together.We had caught the tide beautifully upon the turn and there was not the least hint of current.

> I was easily the best swimmer of the three . . .Swimming has natural affinities with Judo.Both arts depend upon one's willingness to surrender a rigid and nervous attachment to the upright position. (pp 118-119)

As they swim they partake of that mysterious openness and beauty that Jake sees in the sky which also includes each other.They complete their swim with a genuine awareness of each other.Here,as in later novels,water is used to suggest an unrestricted access to the moral life which provides, although briefly,a relief from the world of the ego.[8]

In this midnight swim there is not merely the bonhomie consequent upon the pubcrawl,but a sense that to really 'see' the world somehow involves the lifting of a veil which is normally held in place by the activities of the ego.At the centre of this experience is the apprehension of others as separate beings,and not as just a part of the individual's egocentric world.For Jake the beginning of this moral process is during his swim in the Thames.It finishes with him able to let Anna go,and ready to acknowledge the 'wonders of the world'(p 286) in the colouration of Mrs Tinckham's cats without trying to produce an explanatory theory.

The change in Jake largely takes place in Paris,presented as an unreal world of carnival and fairy tale enchantment,where Jake rejects the sinecure offered him by Madge for two related reasons.Firstly,he is surprised by the fact that Jean-Pierre has written a good novel.Secondly,he sees that Madge wants to possess him.In Iris Murdoch's thought to see good art,let alone produce it,one must acknowledge the contingency of the world in the same way that one must love without imposing the self.The shock that Jean-Pierre is actually a good writer forces Jake to comes to terms with himself because he is suddenly made to see the real Jean-Pierre rather than his own projection of him.

> I felt an indignant horror as at some monstrous reversal of the order of nature:as a man might feel if his favourite opinion was suddenly controverted in detail by a chimpanzee.I had classed Jean-Pierre once and for all.That he should secretly have been

> changing his spots,secretly improving his style,ennobling his thought, purifying his emotions:all this was really too bad . . . It wrenched me,like the changing of a fundamental category.A man whom I had taken on as a business partner had turned out to be a rival in love.
> (pp 191-192)

Jean-Pierre,as a good novelist,has a grasp of reality which Jake lacks,a point made forcibly by his ensuing search for Anna in the Tuileries gardens where he pursues a phantom.Reality,after all,is to be found in the contingent world of London rather than the phantasmagoria of Paris.Jake returns to London to release Anna and Hugo from his egocentric view of the world.The significance of the novel's ending is well commented on by Malcolm Bradbury.He sees that Jake recognises the 'individuality of persons and of things as they are'.He continues:

> The discovery of the ending is a traditional one,one we know from George Eliot or James;it belongs with the historic business of the novel.Still in her way of making the book and reaching the ending Miss Murdoch strikes,or ought to strike,us as an inventor of a very unusual sort.For one thing it is an ending as much philosophic as moral;to encroach on the individuality of others is less a failure in sensitivity or moral competence,as in the tradition, than in knowing the truth.[9]

It is this insistent identification of the moral with the search for the real,the true,that marks Iris Murdoch's work as distinctive.Goodness, as Plato held,is not just a matter of conduct but of knowledge.

Under the Net is more firmly located in its particular geographical world than are the majority of Iris Murdoch's novels,[10] and yet the descriptions of that world are used for particular effect which does not depend upon the presentation of a specific social scene.Jake may belong to a shifting bohemian world,but the novel does not concern itself with an analysis of that world.Hammersmith and Earl's Court are precisely evoked, and yet it would not matter if there were no places to which these descriptions corresponded.The detail of the descriptions is an indicator

the 1950s.When Jake first meets Anna at the Mime Theatre he does so in a room which denies by its multifariousness the commitment to purity demanded by Anna's theory.It also resembles,in its packed contingency, the world of London outside the Mime Theatre.

> I looked round the room.An astonishing medley of objects lay about in piles which in places reached up to the ceiling The contents of the room had a strange cohesion and homogeneity,and they seemed to adhere to the walls like the contents of a half-empty jam jar.Yet here was every kind of thing.It was like a vast toy shop that had been hit by a bomb.In my first glance I noticed a French horn,a rocking-horse,a set of red-striped tin trumpets,some Chinese silk robes,a couple of rifles,Paisley shawls,teddy bears,glass balls, tangles of necklaces and other jewellery,a convex mirror,a stuffed snake,countless toy animals,and a number of tin trunks out of which multi-coloured costumes trailed.Exquisite and expensive playthings lay enlaced with the gimcrack contents of Christmas crackers.I sat down on the nearest seat,which happened to be the back of the rocking-horse,and surveyed the scene.(p 42)

The effect of this bizarre collection is to make Jake look.And the novel itself produces the same effect;the extravagant incident,the curious thing, awake the same delight in the world portrayed as Jake feels in the Mime Theatre.By presenting reality as a similar jumble of things and events the novel insists upon the sheer random surprisingness of the world.

In the same way,the changes in direction of the plot point to the place which chance has in the world.People may make plans and projects,but they can be forced to change them because of the intervention of chance.The plot of Under the Net abounds in such changes of direction.For instance,Jake, who has gone to Sammy's flat to recover his manuscript after learning of its presence there by overhearing Sammy and Sadie plotting,finds Mr Mars the dog film-star there,and kidnaps him.The effect of this action is to unleash a whole new sequence of events which are little related to the

original project,and finally leaves Jake with Mars.For a man who claims to hate contingency Jake assists in generating a staggering quantity of it ,and that quantity pushes Jake into an acknowledgement of its significance for him.

> Like a fish which swims calmly in deep water,I felt all about me the secure supporting pressure of my own life.Ragged,inglorious and apparently purposeless,but my own.(p 282)

With his acknowledgement of this,Jake feels that it is 'the first day of the world'.In a sense it is,for it is the first day on which he has seen the world rather than his own distortion of it.

At the beginning of the novel Jake is the unsystematic inheritor of Sartrean existentialism.He sees his life as exemplifying the 'lonely awareness of the individual' rather than being integrated with society.[11] His world is solipsistic in an unthinking way rather than as the result of the serious application of principles:his view of Finn for example:

> It may be,though,that Finn misses his inner life,and that that is why he follows me about,as I have a complex one and highly differentiated. Anyhow,I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe,and cannot conceive that he has one containing me;and this arrangement seems restful for both of us.(p 9)

But Finn,too,insists that his individuality is noticed when,at the end of the novel,he returns to Ireland,and it is revealed that he has a world of his own which Jake has simply taken no notice of.The pattern which Jake has imposed upon the world,the net through which he views the universe, dissolves before the insistent pressure of reality.It is to his credit that he can come to see that this is so although the process is slow.At the start of the book Jake complains

> This is what always happened.I would be at pains to put my universe in order and set it ticking,when suddenly it would burst again into a mess of the same poor pieces.(p 9)

But by the end he has recognised that the world is not a machine which runs for his benefit.He can plan to write a novel,a work which will celebrate

the contingent formlessness of the world.

Under the Net concerns itself with breaking out from the net which Jake spreads over reality.It is,as Malcolm Bradbury pointed out[12], about the discovery of truth.That truth is that reality is complex and mysterious,essentially beyond the self and governed by chance.To see it properly,to love the world and its inhabitants,involves letting go,releasing the world from the grip of the ego and its self-protecting theories.The novel establishes the central concern of Iris Murdoch as both novelist and moralist:the equation of love and knowledge which is found in Plato.

NOTES

1.See above p 37.

2.Under the Net (London,1954),pp 90-91.Tamarus puts Jake's view,and Annandine,Hugo's.

3.See above p 10.

4.See above pp 15-17.

5.See The Sovereignty of Good,pp 35-40,and in particular the following:

'But if we consider what the work of attention is like,how continuously it goes on,and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us,we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over.' p 37.See above p 20.

6.See 'The House of Fiction' pp 64-65:

'It plays with a philosophical idea.The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of view are absolutely essential,divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention.'

7.Unofficial Selves,p 241.

8.See also The Nice and the Good (London,1968),pp 292-305;Bruno's Dream (London 1969),p 240;Nuns and Soldiers (London,1980),pp 110-112.See also The Sea,The Sea (London,1978) p 475,where the following passage is strikingly similar in tone to that from Under the Net under discussion here:

'As I lay there,listening to the soft slap of the sea,and thinking these sad and strange thoughts,more and more stars had gathered,obliterating the separateness of the Milky Way and filling up the whole sky.And far far away in that ocean of gold,stars were silently shooting and falling and finding their fates,among those billions and billions of merging golden lights.'

It is also worth noting in the present context that The Philosopher's Pupil (London,1983) has many of its scenes set in a swimming pool which is fed by a hot spring.

9.Malcolm Bradbury,Possibilities:Essays on the State of the Novel (Oxford, 1973),pp 245-246.

10.This is noted by both Bradbury (Possibilities,p232) and by Kermode ('The House of Fiction' p65).

11.Sartre p 25.

12.Possibilities p 246.Cited above p52.

CHAPTER TWO:THE FLIGHT FROM THE ENCHANTER

The Flight from the Enchanter (1956) presents a darker picture of the Sartrean pursuit of freedom than does Under the Net.What,in the first novel,is the cause of Jake's egocentric fantasies,and which leads to the comic misunderstandings of his quest,becomes in The Flight from the Enchanter the root cause of a mechanistic world where individuals are threatened,or even devoured,by the projections of others.The machinery of the self,when operated with sufficient intensity,produces real,or apparently real, machines which can actually destroy others.The exercise of power prevents the possibility of achieving any moral vision,not merely for those who wield the power but for those who are subject to it as well.Even the victims become self-centred as they think only of escape;Rosa Keepe ignores Nina's pleas for help because she is too bound up in her own need to escape the Lusiewicz brothers.

The extension of Sartrean existentialism to provide an image of a mechanistic world is attributable to the influence on Iris Murdoch of the work of Elias Canetti,to whom The Flight from the Enchanter is dedicated, and whose book she afterwards reviewed[1],commenting that Crowds and Power is the work of a 'truly imaginative thinker'.In her review,Iris Murdoch picks on certain features of Canetti's book which have become part of her own imaginative world;she claims that

> Canetti has done what philosophers ought to do,and what they used to do:he has provided us with new concepts.[2]

The concepts from Crowds and Power most relevant to The Flight from the Enchanter are the ones which Iris Murdoch refers to as his 'central theory of "command" and "survival"'.[3]

Crowds and Power is an individual mixture of sociology,anthropology and history which stands at the opposite extreme to Iris Murdoch's own ethics.It is concerned with the individual as part of a crowd rather than as a separate being.The only figures in whom Canetti shows much interest are those who exercise power,such as kings,paranoiacs and orchestral

conductors.In his theory there is a similarity to Sartre's theory of the inevitable hostility of one individual for another.Canetti sees the wielder of power as feeling menaced by those over whom he has power,and acting with hostility towards them:

> Whether or not he is actually in danger from enemies,he always feels himself menaced.The most dangerous threat comes from his own people,those to whom he habitually gives orders,who are close to him and know him well.[4]

Canetti sees the relationships of power as central to the post-war world, and his statement of this bears directly on the world of The Flight from the Enchanter with its political refugees and the bureaucratic control exercised over them.

> There is a clear trend towards the formation of enormous double crowds,named after whole quarters of the globe - East and West. These contain so much within themselves that there is less and less remaining outside them;and what there is seems powerless.[5]

Taken on an individual scale,this is an accurate description of the situation of many of the figures in The Flight from the Enchanter.

Canetti's argument presents human behaviour from neither the Freudian nor the Marxist point of view.His analysis of different societies and historical periods stresses that human beings live in masses,and he suggests that people respond to mass images in a common way.For him,there is no possibility of individuality for the majority of mankind.Their existence is merely as a part of the sea,the quintessential crowd image:

> The sea has no interior frontiers and is not divided into peoples and territories.It has one language which is the same everywhere. There is thus no single human being who can be,as it were,excluded from it.It is too comprehensive to correspond exactly to any of the crowds we know,but it is an image of stilled humanity;all life flows into it and it contains all life.[6]

On this view the pattern is all;uniqueness issomething which can be managed by very few.Kings may possess 'uniqueness,isolation,distance and

preciousness'[7], attributes which can be recognized at sight but even so they participate in the mass relatioship by exercising power. And flight, for Canetti, is a form of protection for the individual for,

> No-one is going to assume that he, out of so many, will be the victim and, since the sole movement of the whole flight is towards salvation, each is convinced that he personally will attain it.[8]

In the same way that Under the Net 'plays' with its philosophical idea, The Flight from the Enchanter 'plays' with the ideas of Elias Canetti. The novel tests the validity of his concepts, elaborating on Iris Murdoch's comments in her review in The Spectator:

> He has also shown, in ways which seem to me to be entirely fresh, the interaction of 'the mythical' with the ordinary stuff of human life. The mythical is not something 'extra'; we live in myth and symbol all the time.[9]

Her review does not make explicit what she means by the 'mythical' here, but from the context it seems that she has in mind the large patterns which Canetti sees as operating recurrently in human society. In The Flight from the Enchanter there are specific analogues with Canetti's central concepts. Mischa Fox exercises the same kind of power as one of Canetti's kings; the survival of some leads to the death of others, as in the case of Rosa and Nina; Calvin Blick passes on the 'sting' of obeying commands by tormenting Hunter Keepe; Agnes Casement and the Lusiewicz brothers seek power in their different ways.

For the characters in The Flight from the Enchanter significant action seems only to be a form of flight; although they may dream of freedom they are unable to achieve this. At the opening of the novel, Annette Cockeyne escapes from Ringenhall, believing that she can be free. To demonstrate that freedom she swings from the chandelier, which

> began to ring, not with a deafening peal but with a very high and sweet tinkling sound.[10]

Like the sound of the chandelier, the drive for freedom proves a disappointment. Annette leaves her school to discover that she is not a free individual

but a figure in a crowd.As A.S.Byatt remarks,this novel is not so much about degrees of freedom as degrees of enslavement.[11]

Freedom as conceived by Annette is a watered down version of Sartre's concept. It is romantic and self-reliant but fundamentally naive.She does not understand that the world into which she moves is a dangerous mixture of bureaucratic power and arbitrary limitation,nor that some individuals possess undefined and therefore almost unrestricted power.To try to act as if one is free is to act as if one is,to use one of the novel's most frequent images,a fish that has come out of water.[12] All that such attempts at freedom can manage is a momentary diversion,as when Rosa hurls a paper weight through the fish tank during Mischa's party.The fish may be freed,but they are freed only to die (Chapter 15).

To survive and prosper in the novel it is necessary to become part of the machinery that dominates the lives of others.Calvin Blick accepts the necessary accompaniment of becoming Mischa's slave:he knows that Mischa 'killed' him years ago (p 306),but he has none of the difficulties which beset Hunter and Rosa Keepe.If one has sufficient demonic energy,however, one can become an enchanter,as the Lusiewicz brothers do.And the power of such enchanters can only be contained or broken by the power of a greater enchanter.So Rosa,to get rid of the brothers,must sell herself into the power of Mischa Fox.She comes to see that her relationship to Mischa is essentially that of a courtier.Canetti describes their homage as consisting

> in <u>being there</u>,their faces turned towards the ruler,gathered round him,but not approaching him too close,dazzled by him,fearing him and looking to him as the source of all things.[13]

But it is not only Rosa who occupies this position.Nearly all the characters in the novel have this relationship with Mischa,who is feared yet needed by Rainborough and Annette as well as by Rosa and Nina.Indeed, Mischa's court is brought into existence at his party.Of this,Rainborough observes that Mischa's parties are

> as often as not carefully constructed machines for the forcing of various plots and dramas.(p 193)

Mischa's plots remain mysterious.He wants to gain control of The Artemis apparently simply because it is there and it is free of him.He must bring all within the circle of his enchantment,and his power,when invoked,is never purely beneficial.He may cause the Parliamentary question to be asked which rids Rosa of the Lusiewicz brothers,but that same question causes Nina to despair and to commit suicide.

In such a restrictive and mechanical world real individuals can only exist in a powerless and withdrawn state.Peter Saward,whom everyone recognizes to be a man of extraordinary goodness,pursues his attempt to decipher a Kastanic script in the isolation engendered by his advanced but quiescent tuberculosis.He alone in the novel is able to love selflessly. His love for Rosa does not prevent him from letting her go;he makes no attempt to persecute her with his love because he is

> a personality without frontiers.Saward did not defend himself by placing others.He did not defend himself.(p 34)

Saward's goodness sets him apart from the world as surely as does his illness.By remaining withdrawn he can remain unscathed in a way which is simply impossible for most characters.For them,the world is a machine that threatens to destroy them,an image which finds expression in Nina's dream of her sewing machine which savages the material on which is printed a map of the world,and then threatens her (Chapter Eleven).The only other figure who emerges from the novel unscathed is Annette Cockeyne.She remains an uncut precious stone,saved by a fundamental innocence.She is not eaten by the dragon,which is what Mischa says happens to young girls who believe that they can dominate the forces of evil,but she does not achieve anything of significance.As she goes out into what she calls 'the school of life' her headmistress tells her that she does not think she is ready to benefit from the curriculum,and that judgement is largely true.Annette floats, fish-like,through the events of the novel,never permanently scarred because she is never fully involved.She is protected by her parents who are wealthy cosmopolitans;her father is a diplomat,and her mother is a powerful enchantress in her own right,as is demonstrated by her efficient removal

of Agnes Casement (Chapter Twenty-four).Annette sees sometimes that she is not fully involved in life:

> Annette felt always that she was travelling at a speed which was not her own . . .she could not break the spell and cross the barrier into what seemed to her at such moments to be her own world.She stayed on the train until it reached the terminus . . .But the world of the chambermaid and the cyclist and the little strange hotel continued to exist,haunting and puzzling her with a dream of something slow and quiet from which she was ever shut away.(pp 62-63)

If Annette is cut off from reality by her parents and their style of life,John Rainborough is also removed from what he sees as really significant by his own life.

> It was many years now since Rainborough had put it to himself that the only matter which really concerned him was the achievement of wisdom.Sometimes he called this,the achievement of goodness;but just now,for various reasons,he prefered the other title.(p 193)

It is Rainborough's involvement in the offices of SELIB which vitiates his concern for the good and makes him defend himself against the machinations of Agnes Casement by adopting similar power tactics to hers.Rainborough, despite his inclinations,finds himself caught up in the world of mechanical power-seeking and treating other people as mere pawns.That he is not very good at this,and eventually needs the assistance of Marcia Cockeyne to rid himself of Miss Casement is not surprising,but his presence in the novel shows how any involvement with the world,even at the low level which Rainborough displays,militates against the pursuit of goodness.

Indeed,the novel does not,as Peter Wolfe suggests,concern itself with the obstacles which we must overcome in order to be free[14],but shows an image of a world in which it is impossible to achieve freedom,whether that concept is defined politically or morally,and equally impossible to achieve goodness without withdrawing oneself almost totally from the world.The impossibility of that moral task is linked to the bureaucratic power of organisations like SELIB (Special European Labour Immigration Board),and

and the existence of concepts like the FPE (Furthest Point East) line which treat people not as individuals but as crowds to be manipulated.

NOTES

1. Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power, translated by Carol Stewart (London, 1962). Originally published as Masse und Macht. (Hamburg, 1960). Reviewed by Iris Murdoch, 'Mass, Myth and Might', Spectator, 7 September 1962, pp 337-338.

2. 'Mass, Myth and Might' p 338.

3. 'Mass, Myth and Might' p 337.

4. Crowds and Power p 469.

5. Crowds and Power p 466.

6. Crowds and Power p 81.

7. Crowds and Power p 416.

8. Crowds and Power p 53.

9. 'Mass, Myth and Might' p 338.

10. Iris Murdoch, The Flight from the Enchanter (London 1956), p 11.

11. Degrees of Freedom p 41.

12. Annette is frequently seen as a fish. At the end of Chapter 5 she sees herself as one. Rainborough likens making advances to her to hunting fish (p 135).

13. Crowds and Power p 400.

14. Peter Wolfe, The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and her Novels, (Columbia, 1966).

CHAPTER THREE:THE SANDCASTLE

The Sandcastle (1957) does not have a high reputation among critics of Iris Murdoch's work.A.S.Byatt claims that the novel does not escape being 'a women's novelette (or perhaps an expansion of a story for a women's magazine'.[1] More recently,Elizabeth Dipple judges that it is a failure in 'literary terms'.However,she does see The Sandcastle as containing 'Murdoch's first serious religious examination of the moral life of the good'.[2] Here,as elsewhere,Elizabeth Dipple misses the fundamental point of Iris Murdoch's ethics as reflected in her novels as well as stated in her philosophical writing;there is no God.Consequently,it seems perverse to claim that she presents a 'religious' view of the moral life.It is true that Bledyard,the art master at St Bride's school,is the spokesman for the ethical viewpoint in the novel which most closely represents Iris Murdoch's own,but the only time that he mentions God is in the context of art,and his significant contributions to the ethics of the novel are couched in the secular terminology of Iris Murdoch's own thought.[3]

The Sandcastle contains Iris Murdoch's first articulation of a moral view which is opposed to existentialism.It is put forward by Bledyard, who is the first in a line of good men who,in wordly terms,are seen as inept or comic.[4] It is also of importance that he is the art master,for art is to become one of the key images for the existence of an unselfish, real and authoritative good in the novels.[5]

The novel also contains some other aspects which are to recur in later work.The Sandcastle may not escape the charge of being women's magazine stuff,but it is of interest to ask why Iris Murdoch chose that material.[6] After the bohemian world of Under the Net and the world of refugees and civil servants of The Flight from the Enchanter,The Sandcastle consciously presents an ordinary world where a schoolmaster with a nagging wife falls in love with a young woman who comes to the school on business.It is an opportunity to examine moral virtue in an everyday context.Bill Mor has to accept the life he has,not escape to some fantasy lover.

Mor plans to run away with Rain Carter,who has come to the school to paint the retired headmaster's portrait,but is stopped when his wife,Nan,announces his wish to stand for Parliament.Rain sees that she cannot go with him because he is a part of his own life and family and she is not.Mor himself feels that 'his whole previous life contained him like a strait-jacket' (p 300) an image which reflects not only the knowledge that he is held by the life he has,but also his disappointment and frustration at the collapse of his fantasy.

If much of The Sandcastle evokes a recognisably real world,then the world to which Mor dreams of escaping with Rain Carter is recognizably fantasy.She comes from the outside,trailing a sense of excitement which makes Mor's life look dull.But the dullness of the known world is set against the carefully conjured fantasy of his awareness of Rain and his feelings for her.

> Then somewhere beyond the pavilion a patch of white shimmering light began to form itself.It quivered at the corner of Mor's field of attention as he wandered slowly back again in the opposite direction.He stopped and took in what it was.It was Rain,who was approaching the scene across an expanse of open grass.She was dressed in a light-blue cotton dress with a wide skirt and a deep round neck, and she was carrying a frilly white parasol.She had rather a diffident air,and twirled the parasol nervously as she came forward.The moving pattern of shadows fell upon her face.Mor looked at her,and he felt as if an enormous vehicle had driven straight through him,leaving a blank hole to the edges of which he still raggedly adhered.(p 163)

To see this just as the stuff of women's magazines is to miss the point. The tone of the writing here catches the fantasy and its derivative nature as it also catches the self-conscious posturing of Rain Carter.That it is unanalytic and imprecise is quite deliberate.Both Mor and Rain are caught up in images of themselves which have little substance in reality;they are, in Sartre's terminology,acting in 'bad faith'.[7] It takes a detached observer, Bledyard,to be able to see what lies behind Mor's behaviour.His analysis,

which Mor resents,stresses not only the demands made by the 'roots' of Mor's life,but also that Mor is acting out a domestic version of Sartrean existentialism.He opposes this with the definition of freedom later to be found in 'On God and Good'[8].Mor says:

> "All I can say is that this is my situation and my life and I shall decide what to do about it."
>
> "You speak as if this were a sort of virtue," said Bledyard,
>
> "you speak as if to be a free man was just to get what you want regardless of convention.But real freedom is a total absence of concern about yourself." (p 217)

Bledyard's view that Mor is living in 'dreams of happiness,dreams of freedom' (p 216) is precise in fitting Mor's fantasy to a debased and popularized version of a philosophical position.His demand is that Mor should respect the 'real',and although Bledyard is regarded by St Bride's school as a joke,and despite the fact that Mor regards him as an intrusive busybody,that demand is never undermined.

The demands of the real are also asserted in another way in The Sandcastle,which drew the attention of Frank Kermode[9].Refering to the incident in the novel where Rain Carter's Riley falls into the stream and linking this with the removal of the bell from the lake in The Bell, he coined the term 'technical excursions' and asked if they had any significance.Iris Murdoch replied dismissively that they were 'pure play'. But fourteen years after that interview she wrote of

> the playfulness of good art which delightedly seeks and reveals the real.[10]

And this is what happens in The Sandcastle.Of course the incident is 'pure play',a simple delight in story telling and in the elaboration of an incident. But the language of this chapter (Chapter Six) suggests that something more important is going on.

Mor goes for a drive with Rain Carter:the sense of escapism is strong. He feels guilty at leaving the school for the afternoon.He telephones his wife and lies about where he is,avoiding mention of Rain.Throughout these

pages there is a stress on escape:

> They turned,and in a moment were in a country lane.The murmur of the traffic diminished to silence.The leaves met over their heads.Miss Carter slowed the car down.
>
> "This is a surprise," she said, "that to escape is so easy." (p 84)

She wants to find a river,and they come across one suddenly,as if it is some kind of illusion:

> With a simultaneous cry they greeted what now appeared quite suddenly upon the road before them.Miss Carter braked violently,and approached at a walking pace.She said, "How strange, I thought at first it was a mirage." She stopped the Riley within a few feet of the ford.
>
> The water ran twinkling across the road in a wide steady sheet. They could hear it running.For a while they sat in an entranced silence listening to its noise.(p 87)

They drive down the track following the river.Mor takes the wheel,and throughout they exist in an enclosed world of leafy green enchantment.In later novels,Iris Murdoch is to use natural scenery as an intense experience which leads to moral development as characters really look at what surrounds them.[11]But here the enchantment of their own fantasy prevents them from seeing what is there.

> He looked at Miss Carter.She was standing deep among the tangle of leaves and flowers on the river bank.She had a drugged enchanted look upon her face.As if blindly,her hands reached out into the foliage.She plucked a leaf,and conveyed it to her mouth,and chewed it thoughtfully,her eyes upon the water.(p 91)

In this scene,the eye that can see the blackthorn giving way to 'hawthorn, and hawthorn to elder' is not that of either of the characters,but that of the author,who,by registering this fact herself,indicates the lack of attention on the part of Mor and Rain to the real world.

Rain Carter swims in the river and Mor ponders his situation.He realizes it is late and turns the car round, only to get it stuck over the bank of

the stream.The elaborate efforts to get the car wheels to grip and to save the situation when part of the bank gives way have a comic delight because of the inevitability of the outcome.

> They watched.Very very slowly the big car was tilting towards the water.There was a soft gurgling sound as pieces of the river bank descended and were engulfed.Mor took Miss Carter by the arm and drew her back.There was a moment's pause,during which was audible the steady voice of the stream,and the buzz of the surrounding woodland.The car was poised now,its inside wheels well clear of the ground,its outside wheels biting deep into the soft earth half-way down the bank.Then slowly again it began to move.Higher and higher the wheels rose from the ground,as the roof of the car inclined more and more sharply until it stood vertically above the water.Then with a grinding crash of buckling metal and subsiding earth the car fell,turning over as it went,and came to rest upside down with its roof upon the bed of the stream.(p 98)

The Riley here seems to move of its own volition;despite Mor's efforts to drive it out it falls into the river,shattering the 'buzz of the surrounding woodland'.The sheer real hard bulk of the car has worked to destroy the fantasy which they have been creating.Mor is left with no hope of being able to conceal the truth,although that is what he has wanted to do.He will have to explain to his wife where he has been.

However,he is saved by chance.Tim Burke has seen him driving off with Rain and telephones Nan to say that Mor has spent the afternoon with him.

It is perhaps one of the failings of The Sandcastle that Tim does intervene and thus prevent Mor from facing up to the consequences of his behaviour.However,the real interest of this episode lies in the way in which the Riley,to put it somewhat fancifully,refuses to accept the fantasy and the lie which Mor is attempting to impose on the situation.Reality is not personified by Iris Murdoch,it does not will things to happen,but it does have a kind of brute stubbornness which means that people cannot impose

their will upon it.In this scene,the Riley,by falling into the river, insists that the situation be taken account of and that reality be examined, even in the attention which Mor and Rain give the Riley at this time.The Riley actually achieves what Bledyard recommends,attention to reality.The technicalities of the situation are not really important,but the sense that there is a hard physical real world beyond the control of the individual is.

In addition to the reality of the physical world,the world of art is used in The Sandcastle as an image of the existence of the good.But it is Bledyard,the art teacher,rather than Rain Carter,the practising painter,who is the character with proper vision.Rain makes her portrait of Demoyte 'too beautiful' according to Bledyard (p 172),just as she makes her vision of life with Mor too beautiful to be realistic.Rain must grow if she is to become a good artist and leave the world of egoistic fantasy.And under the pressure of Nan's revelation of Mor's political ambitions,and Bledyard's criticism of her painting,she starts to respond to reality.She acknowledges the validity of Bledyard's criticism and repaints the picture,and she also sees Mor clearly as being tied by his 'roots' and formed by his own life. She says:

> "You are a growing tree.I am only a bird.You cannot break your roots and fly away with me.Where could we go where you wouldn't always be wanting the deep things that belong to you,your children, and this work which you know is your work?" (p 304)

The Sandcastle may,as here,be a little mawkish at times,but it is of a piece with the philosophical position stated in The Idea of Perfection. Just as the story of the mother-in-law shows moral activity in a mundane domestic context,so The Sandcastle deals with a similar context in which lesser virtues than the good can be pursued,and where the moral value of the ordinary life can be examined.[12]If the novel is not a complete success it is of interest as the first attempt to provide images which oppose the existentialist picture of contemporary man which Iris Murdoch sees as typical of contemporary literature.[13]It is not a religious ethic

which appears in The Sandcastle but a secular one based on respect for the 'real',the world outside oneself,and the willingness to lose one's own desires in the moral effort of paying attention to other people.

NOTES

1. Degrees of Freedom p 61.

2. Work for the Spirit p 144.

3. Iris Murdoch, The Sandcastle (London, 1957), pp 75-79 and pp 214- 217.

4. In addition to Bledyard, this list includes Tallis Browne (A Fairly Honourable Defeat), Edgar Demarnay (The Sacred and Profane Love Machine), Arthur Fisch (A Word Child) and Tim Reede (Nuns and Soldiers). There is also a group who, though not comic, also share a certain unworldliness with Bledyard. These include Ann Peronett (An Unofficial Rose), Edmund Narraway (The Italian Girl), Marcus Fisher (The Time of the Angels) and William Eastcote (The Philosopher's Pupil).

5. See The Bell, pp 191-192; Hugh's Tintoretto in An Unofficial Rose, p 98 and elsewhere; Bronzino's Allegory in The Nice and the Good, p 323; Giorgione's picture of Saint Anthony and Saint George and the allusion to Titian's 'Sacred and Profane Love' in the Uffizi Gallery in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, pp 41-42; Titian's 'Diana and Actaeon', contrasted with the work of Max Beckmann throughout the novel, in Henry and Cato, p 296 and Charles Arrowby's visit to the Wallace Collection in The Sea, The Sea, pp 169-171.

6. A.S. Byatt comments on this (Degrees of Freedom pp 62-63) but sees it as an aspect of the novel's failure that its 'ordinariness' is not fully realized. She also sees the novel as 'journalistic' after the 'crystalline' works Under the Net and The Flight from the Enchanter.

7. See Being and Nothingness pp 47-70 for Sartre's lengthy description of the activities which are forms of 'bad faith'.

8. The Sovereignty of Good pp 66-67.

9. See 'The House of Fiction' pp 64-65. Cited above pp 37,47,49.

10. The Fire and the Sun p 84.

11. See A Fairly Honourable Defeat p 167 and Nuns and Soldiers pp 150-154.

12. The mother-in-law story is in The Sovereignty of Good pp 17-23 and is discused above pp 15-16.

13. See above pp 10,15,26,30-31.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BELL

Of Iris Murdoch's early novels, The Bell (1958) most fully articulates her moral philosophy. In consequence, perhaps, it is generally reckoned to be the best of her early work. A.S. Byatt praises it for containing characters who have 'a life of their own which exists beyond' the novel's end.[1] And if the novel is built around the need to see clearly, to love the people who make up the world, then perhaps it is not surprising that critics should find this quality. Its central concern is with moral authority, in the sense of that in the world which commands obedience. This authority is set against the idea of power which is seen as an aspect of the self. Authority is found beyond the self, and its value and strength are derived from its correspondence with the real.

The opposition between authority and power is reflected in the world of the community who inhabit Imber Court. The Court itself and its grounds are a beautiful natural world of woods and parkland and a beautiful house. It is a world which is beyond any one individual, and throughout the novel the ability to respond to the beauties of Imber is seen as a fundamental moral attribute. The Court contains a number of people who make up the religious community which operates there. They have come there for a variety of reasons, but they all tend to exhibit aspects of power. The community splits into factions, for example about whether they should shoot pigeons or buy a mechanical cultivator, and these questions are argued with a certain lack of regard for the views of others and a determination to get one's own way. As Dora comes down to Imber in the train at the start of the novel she reflects that she is returning

> deliberately, into the power of someone whose conception of life excluded and condemned her deepest hopes and who now had good reason to judge her wicked.[2]

Although Paul, Dora's husband, of whom she is thinking, is a visitor to the community in a strict sense, his attitude is typical of the relations which they tend to have with their fellows. They judge and use supposedly

moral arguments for purposes of power.

From the very start,Dora is associated with the natural world.She rescues the butterfly from the railway carriage and releases it,to Paul's surprise and displeasure,on her arrival at the station.The description of Dora at this point (the end of Chapter One) is reminiscent of the Gainsborough painting which she sees,later in the novel,in the National Gallery.Simultaneously,then,Dora is in touch with both the natural world and the world of art,both of which are areas of great moral vibrancy.[3]

But though Dora comes with a touch of natural moral sensitivity she enters a world where power or suppressed power is the dominant form of relationship.On her arrival she is bundled into a religious service from which she escapes to walk,significantly shoeless,in the park outside.All those characters who display moral sensitivity feel the need to escape to the outside of the community's confines.Toby,Dora and Michael at different times have to remove themselves from the tensions of Imber.After the discussion about the shooting of the pigeons Michael walks out 'wishing to be alone' (p 98),and Toby frequently is seen rushing out from the Court to commune with the natural world outside.

The members of the community seem in some way unable to distinguish between figures of power and figures of authority,They show extraordinary deference for the bishop,but do not distinguish him in kind from the Abbess. Yet she is different,for she is the only figure of authority who does not use her authority to bolster her personal power.Even Michael,who is nominal leader of the Imber community,and who is anxious to act with regard for the good,finds himself in

> a region where power was evil,and where he could not honourably find the means to strip himself of it completely.(pp 86-87)

And the community's most admired member,James Tayper Pace,is also a power broker,although in a rather unexpected way.His power is a kind of sanctimonious rigidity,an insistence on the adherence to moral laws simply because they are there,rather than acting with love to consider the genuine complexity and difficulty of moral decisions and principles.

But if power is exercised by nearly all the people who make up the world of The Bell, the novel also gives life to genuine centres of moral authority, centres which, in The Sandcastle, only appeared in an academic guise in Bledyard's comments on paintings and on Mor's behaviour. In The Bell the good is rendered into images which powerfully affect the characters of the novel, and the apprehension of which, in the case of Dora, lead to a completely unexpected moral growth. These images are not the theoretical moral pronouncements that appear in the sermons of James Tayper Pace and Michael, but are the densely realized living world which surrounds Imber, and the paintings in the National Gallery, which give Dora a firm sense of something outside herself.

At Imber itself, morality is mechanical; there is little sense within the community of charity or a love of nature. Dora is told that she is not allowed to have wild flowers in her room; Nick is neither welcomed nor assisted. Even the forms of worship, which derive from the Abbey and follow the daily office, do not seem to have caught the central significance of what the Abbess has to say. James Tayper Pace insists in his sermon that

> we should consider not what delights or disgusts us, morally speaking, but what is enjoined and what is forbidden. (p 133)

Rather than being concerned with the human individuals with whom he is confronted, James's interest is in the rules. The Abbess, on the other hand, the distant figure of true virtue, is more aware of the limitations of human beings in their relationship with the good.

> Our duty, the Abbess said, is not necessarily to seek the highest regardless of the realities of our spiritual life as it in fact is, but to seek that place, that task, those people, which will make our spiritual life most constantly grow and flourish. (pp 82-83)

And it is Dora, despite - or perhaps because of - her refusal to have anything to do with the Abbey, who, in accepting the realities of her own spiritual life, most grows and flourishes.

Dora comes to Imber because her husband is there and because she is afraid of him. She feels herself watched and judged as the erring wife, and in

a fit of 'solipsistic melancholy' goes back to London and her journalist friend Noel Spens.Noel says that the community is just out to make Dora feel guilty,and that she should not feel so as there is no God.Dora,however, feels that Noel too is not fully engaging with her as another person and that 'here too,she felt,she was being organised'.(p 190) This sense of being used,even by Noel,is brought on her by hearing,down the telephone line from Imber,a blackbird singing.She leaves Noel and goes to the National Gallery,and from there back to Imber:

> Her real life,her real problems,were at Imber;and since,somewhere, something good existed,it might be that her problems would be solved after all.(p 192)

The 'something good' which exists is found in its most compelling form in the National Gallery,but the blackbird's song,which inspires her to leave Noel's flat,makes the connection between art and nature clear.But the pictures are the really authoritative agent in taking her back to Imber.

> Dora was always moved by the pictures.Today she was moved,but in a new way.She marvelled,with a kind of gratitude,that they were all still here,and her heart was filled with love for the pictures,for their authority,their marvellous generosity,their splendour.It occured to her that here at last was something real and something perfect.Who had said that,about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour,and by making it part of herself make it worthless. Even Paul,she thought,only existed now as someone dreamt about;or else as a vague external menace never really encountered and understoood. But the pictures were something real outside herself,which spoke to her kindly and yet in sovereign tones,something superior and good whose presence destroyed the dreary trance-like solipsism of her earlier mood.When the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value.But now there was something else in it after all.(pp 191-192)

The significance of this realization,and its effectiveness within the novel,

is that the image of the pictures provides a yardstick for Dora's apprehension of the good,and consequently for the reader too.The whole of this incident (Chapter Fourteen) reduces the Sartrean drive for freedom to a moment of boredom.Dora goes to London because 'she was free',but that freedom is empty and meaningless.She is recalled from the solipsistic day-dream by the sound of the blackbird,and her trip to the National Gallery drives home the necessity of treating the external world with unselfish attention.[4]

In The Bell the good is not presented as a matter of academic theory, as Bledyard presents it in The Sandcastle,but as an active agent in the moral world.The principles realized by Dora in the National Gallery can be applied by her to the world outside.The incident in which they are applied is the raising of the old bell from the lake,the second of Frank Kermode's 'technical excursions'.[5]

Dora returns to Imber Court,which she finds looks 'hostile and censorious'; looking through the window at the community gathered listening to Bach,she thinks

> They had a secure complacent look about them:the spiritual ruling class;and she wished she might grow as fierce and large as a gorilla and shake the flimsy doors off their hinges,drowning the repulsive music in a savage carnivorous yell.(p 195)

She does not pursue that satisfaction,but meets Toby,who tells her that he has discovered an old bell in the lake.Dora realizes that it must be the Abbey's old bell,and determines to exercise her power by raising the bell and surprising the community (Chapter Fifteen).The mechanical detail of how the bell is raised (Chapter Seventeen) is a splendid creation of a world of real resisting objects.Toby's manipulation of the tractor;its shattering roaring noise at night;and the stunning silence after the tractor engine is turned off are brilliantly evoked.But the bell itself is the chief actor in the scene.Its legend,'I am the voice of love.I am called Gabriel', is in direct contrast to the power which Dora has exercised over Toby in persuading him to exert his power to remove the bell from the lake.At

the moment of triumph Toby exercises his new found power and virility on the nearest available person:

> Naked as a fish,Toby felt a miraculous strength twisting inside him.He,and he alone,had pulled the bell from the lake.He was a hero ,he was a king.He fell upon Dora,his two hands reaching for her shoulders,his body collapsing upon hers.He heard her gasp and then relax,receiving his weight,her arm passing round his neck. Clumsily,passionately,Toby's hard lips sought her in the darkness. Struggling together they rolled into the mouth of the bell.
>
> As they did so,the clapper,moving within the dark metal hollow, struck violently against the side,and a muted boom arose and echoed away across the lake whose waters had now once more subsided to rest.(pp 223-224)

As in the incident with the Riley in The Sandcastle[6] ,the object seems to act upon its own volition,and the bell ,the 'voice of love', sounds out, resisting the efforts of Dora and Toby to impose themselves upon the world with their fabricated miracle.The noise of the bell disturbs the sleepers at Imber,as the realization of the existence of others might disturb a solipsistic dream.

The same motif is repeated,though with less technical elaboration,in Chapter Twenty-Two.Dora has planned to substitute the old bell for the new one which is to be taken into the abbey and installed there.Her plan is discovered by Nick who leaks the news to Noel Spens.By one of those twists of plotting beloved by Iris Murdoch,Dora overhears Nick tell Noel about her plan.She realizes that the 'witch-like quality' which has so delighted her in her plan would only exist for her.To the rest of the world,she sees, the whole business would be merely ludicrous.Dora loses her illusions of power;she sees that she has tried to 'wretchedly devour' the bell and to incorporate it into her solipsistic fantasy.But the bell,like the pictures in the National Gallery,is beyond her.It is not merely a resisting object but a work of art in its own right.And as Dora ponders her actions in the light of Nick's conversation with Noel she becomes aware of the moral

authority of the bell:

> She steadied it and stood with both her hands upon it.Attending to it,she was struck again by the miracle of its resurrection and she felt reverence for it,almost love.When she thought how she had drawn it out of the lake and lifted it back into its own airy element she was amazed and felt suddenly unworthy.How could the great bell have suffered her to drag it so unceremoniously and make it begin its new life in an out-house? She should not have tampered with it.She ought by rights to be afraid of it.She was afraid of it.She took her hands off it abruptly.(p 269)

In the face of this huge reality Dora's efforts to play 'the witch' and Toby's new-found sexuality seem unimportant.Dora cannot leave the bell to be subject to Noel's malicious journalism;she feels that the truth of the bell itself must be allowed to speak:

> She had communed with it too long and was under its spell.She had thought to be its master and make it her plaything,but now it was mastering her and would have its will.
>
> . . . Vaguely there came back to her a memory of something that had been said:the truth-telling voice that must not be silenced. (p 270)

And she rings the bell,arousing everyone and shattering a number of plans.

The bell here is not a symbol of moral authority,but an active agent in the real world.It speaks the voice of love in that it demands to be taken seriously as an external factor in Dora's world.It is not something which she can make part of herself.The sounding of the bell leads to the removal of a number of masks at Imber,not the least being that it is Catherine Fawley's vocation to enter the abbey as a novice.Her plunge into the lake and her subsequent hospitalization;her brother Nick's suicide;even Toby's confession to James,all point to the fact that the community at Imber had not seen its own members clearly.The voice of the bell demands that reality be faced,and that the failures of Imber should be recognized as failures of love,which is what the Abbess has said that worldly failures

responsible for these failures,although it is not really so.Michael fails because he sets himself too high a spiritual task.The fact that he is disappointed in his desire to become a priest has led him to be unable to accept himself as he is.Consequently,he cannot see and judge Catherine and Nick clearly,nor can he help them bound up as he is in his own drama.

But if Michael's failures are because he does not know enough about those who surround him through an understandable and quite engaging concern with himself,Dora makes moral progress by breaking through those same selfish concerns.In both cases,the religious man and the atheistic young woman,the moral life - the life of the good - is seen as an attention to the reality which surrounds them.The quasi-religious concerns of the novel are really a blind;moral progress must be made in a secular and godless world,for both Michael and Dora.

NOTES

1. Degrees of Freedom p 73.

2. Iris Murdoch, The Bell (London, 1958) p 18.

3. See The Bell pp191-192, and the discussion below pp 75-76. The picture described at this point in the novel appears to be Gainsborough's 'The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly'. Although there is no absolute correspondence in position there is a similarity between the posture of the girls in the painting and Dora's posture as she releases the butterfly at the end of Chapter One,

4. Dora's 'freedom' is finally seen as the ennui which Iris Murdoch describes in Sartre pp 13-14.

> 'Roquentin's sensations are not in themselves so rare and peculiar. We all of us experience, for instance, that sense of emptiness and meaninglessness which we call ennui. In so far as Sartre exaggerates in Roquentin our ordinary feelings of boredom and loss of meaning this is in order to bring home to us a point which 'carelessness and inattention' usually obscure.'
> In The Bell generally this feeling is recognized as a passing one; its elevation by the name of freedom is seen as a piece of egotism.

5. 'The House of Fiction' pp 64-65. See above p 67.

6. See above p 69.

CHAPTER FIVE: A SEVERED HEAD

Before considering A Severed Head (1961) in particular, it may be appropriate to note that, of Iris Murdoch's twenty-one published novels six are written in the first person. (This figure excludes The Philosopher's Pupil (1983), which is, with its occasionally intrusive first person narrator, a kind of hybrid.) To my knowledge there is no other major novelist writing today who has shown the ability to work so freely in both the first and third person forms. In many ways the territory of 'Murdoch land' is more closely defined in the first person novels than in the third.[1] All the first person narrators are male and their plots are conspicuously violent and erotic in about equal measure. The world of these novels is intellectual or artistic. Money is freely available, and although the narrators may not always be well-off, they never suffer from want. It is true that these generalisations apply to the third person novels, but there is a greater incidence of these qualities in the first person narrations. First person narratives allow the obsessive fantasies of the ego to be presented as they grip the fantasisers. The sense that the world is being forced into their pattern is restricted to the objections or actions of necessarily limited third parties, and the egoistic monomania of the narrators can come to seem to the reader curiously ordinary.

But what really distinguishes the first person novels is that their narrators have a compulsive desire to tell their stories. Their eagerness to launch into their melodramatic, almost catastrophic, histories is in itself a demonstration of the attractiveness of the fantasies of the 'fat relentless ego'.[2] And yet these novels, though so bound up in the web of self, manage to suggest that this web may be broken, and that the semi-mystical transcendence of the self suggested in her philosophy can be brought about. The narrators come to see, or at least to glimpse, that the world beyond themselves is a reality which they cannot simply devour. The narrations record not an achieved moral change, but the

possibility that that change may take place in the future.As Honor Klein tells Martin Lynch-Gibbon,'"You must take your chance!"',and we cannot tell what that chance will hold.[3]

In'Existentialists and Mystics',Iris Murdoch writes that where 'stories are told virtue will be portrayed',but the virtue of the narrators is not actually in the stories that they tell,but in the fact that they can now tell them.[4] In the stories themselves they are blind,fumbling through a world of shadows,unable to see that they create their own darkness.As Jake puts it,'I was in on it...I knew everything.I got it all the wrong way round,that's all'.[5] The same fundamental pattern can be seen in the progress of the other first person narrators.They struggle to escape from a machinery which dominates their lives,a machinery which is largely the product of the ego.Whether that ego is their own,as in Under the Net, The Black Prince,A Word Child or The Sea,The Sea, or someone else's, as is the case in A Severed Head,does not make a great deal of difference. To record the existence of the machinery is paradoxically to begin to escape from it,because it implies knowledge and a greater objectivity on the part of the narrator.The straightforwardness with which Jake Donaghue and Martin Lynch-Gibbon announce,in their opening chapters,that they are telling their stories is indicative that what Martin calls the 'nightmare' has been rendered into art.

According to Wittgenstein (Tractatus 6.41-6.423),ethical statements cannot be made.It is impossible to say what can only be shown (Tractatus 4.1212).[6] Iris Murdoch s novels offer an elaboration of these ideas,in that they provide showings,or images,of the particularity of experience rather than essays in general theory.This is even more so in the case of first person narratives,where the experience of the particular narrator may be paralleled by the experience of other characters within the novel, but there is no sense in which these parallels precisely illuminate the case of the narrator.[7] The particularity induced by the narration makes us see any attempt to generalize as an attempt to reduce the unique individual

to a cog in a larger machine.In fact,any attempt to do this is to commit the same moral error as is committed by many of the subsidiary characters in these novels.It is Palmer Anderson who proposes reductive theories about Martin's behaviour (p 37),and Otto Narraway in The Italian Girl who suggests that both his and his brother Edmund's behaviour can be explained by 'something to do' with their mother.[8]

Palmer Anderson is called,by Martin,a 'fashionable kind of modern magician' (p 24) in his subscription to Freudian determinism and his belief that the psyche

> is almost entirely a matter of mechanics,and mechanical models are the best to understand it with.(p 39)

We should recall,here,Wittgenstein and his remarks about the net of concepts, the passage,of course,which provided the title for Under the Net:

> The different nets correspond to different systems for describing the world.Mechanics determines one form of description of the world by saying that all propositions used in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a given set of propositions - the axioms of mechanics.[9]

That Wittgenstein's theory of language here should be built around Newtonian mechanics is of interest in view of Iris Murdoch's recurrent images of machinery,or of mechanical thought,which can prevent the individual being himself.Palmer Anderson's Freudianism is such a mechanism.

In a sense,A Severed Head takes up the position that Hugo,as Annandine, holds in Jake's book The Silencer[10],but with the important difference that it is not all theory which is felt to be inappropriate to Martin's experience,but the particular one propounded by Palmer.Martin,in essence,is attempting to evade the net cast by Palmer;it is almost as if he is resisting becoming a figment of someone else's imagination.What Edmund Narraway in The Italian Girl is to see as those 'human rights,the rights of secrecy, the right of surprise'[11] are exercised by Martin in the course of the novel. Palmer and Antonia are dismayed by their first discovery of this:

"We thought we knew you,Martin.We have just had a surprise.I will not say that we are disillusioned,but I will say that we are distressed.We have,in a sense,to start again.We have lost our grip. We have to see where you are,we have to see what you are."(p 97)

Of course,this should,in Iris Murdoch's terms,herald some moral change, but for Palmer the habit of mechanical thought is too strong,and he fails to break the patterns of his own magic.His only concern is that Martin has, in behaving unpredictably,destroyed his own cosy world.He is unable to see that Martin is behaving,if not admirably,then at least humanly.

There are other attempts to spread a net across the experiences of the novel,some of which are implicit in the central image of the severed head. A.S.Byatt suggests that the novel is

> Miss Murdoch's attempt to investigate the problem of whether the Sartrean or Freudian view of the severed head (is) correct.[12]

But we should recall that Canetti,too,uses the image of the severed head, held aloft by the triumphant executioner to call forth the crowd's moment of discharge.[13] Although there may be elements of all these general theories in the novel's use of the image,the specific uses of it in the work tend to reject any generalizing approach.It is Alexander who suggests a more valid view,when he speaks of 'interrogating' a sculpted head to see if 'it will tell'him anything (p 53). And this prefigures Honor Klein's own comment:

> "I am a severed head such as primitive tribes and old alchemists used to use,anointing it with oil and putting a morsel of gold upon its tongue to make it utter prophecies.And who knows but that long acquaintance with a severed head might not lead to strange knowledge." (p225)

On this view the head is not the pattern for some general theory,but a means to new understanding.It is part and parcel of the mysteriousness of humanity itself.It is an image for that attraction which moves Martin Lynch-Gibbon away from the egocentric dramas of both Freud and Sartre,and towards the other centred world.In the novel the head is nearer to Canetti's image of its power;Martin feels both fear and excitement in the presence of Honor Klein.The crowd's moment of discharge is transformed into Martin's

realisation of the necessary death of the self as one reaches out for another individual.

It is noticeable that Martin,when he is confronted with the knowledge of Honor's incestuous affair with Palmer,turns first to the literature of psychology which he finds 'scanty and unsatisfactory'.He turns to mythology

> where,with a curious gratification which was almost consoling, I noted the frequency of brother and sister marriages,particularly among royalty and gods.(p 189)[14]

The movement of A Severed Head is away from modern theorising about the human condition.It substitutes for such theories,where individuals are seen as examples of general patterns of behaviour,the primitive truth of myth where individuals are seen as existing as themselves first and foremost. Any general truth which may be enshrined in a myth does not reduce the potency of its individuals;they do not become the slaves of a mechanical scheme of thought.Myth is other -centred.It is less theoretical because more secret.A Severed Head opens with a reference to the myth of Psyche and her child,which would be a god if she kept silent,and mortal if she spoke of her pregnancy (p 17). This is complemented by the reference to Gyges and Candaules in the final chapter.Here it is Gyges who takes over as king as the secrecy of marriage is betrayed by Candaules.(pp 251-252)

The civilised world of explanation,of Antonia's 'metaphysic of the drawing room',must yield to the secrets of the 'dark gods' in the same way that Palmer's domination of the world of the novel must give way to the explosion of reality which takes place in the cellar of Palmer's house when Martin fights Honor Klein.His struggle with her leads directly to him rejecting the first letter which he writes to her explaining his actions in civilized,psychological terms,in favour of one which attempts no such explanation.The struggle in the cellar is the turning point of the novel, leading Martin to go to Cambridge and to discover Palmer's liason with his sister.

The violence of Martin's realisation of Honor as the key to his own

moral growth,symbolised by her manipulation of the Samurai sword while Palmer and Antonia are at G"otterd"ammerung,may be ritualised,but it is in fundamental opposition to the values of Palmer and Antonia.Their belief that the civilised,theorising mind can cope with anything,that they can explain and render harmless all manner of states and attitudes,lies behind Georgie's symbolic decapitation when she cuts off her hair and sends it to Martin.[15] Georgie feels herself in some way killed by the way in which she is taken over by Antonia and Palmer.She sends her hair to Martin and attempts suicide.Ironically,this throws her even more into Palmer's power,and at the end of the novel she is seen leaving with him from the airport.

To deny the existence of the dark gods is essentially destructive in that it distorts the necessary human reaction.Yeats' lines express something of the same point:

> Even the wisest man grows tense
>
> With some sort of violence
>
> Before he can accomplish fate
>
> Know his work,or choose his mate. [16]

The violence of the crucial incidents in A Severed Head reveals not only the secrecy of the mind,but the power of reality as it breaks through the imposed patterns of theory and civilization which are seen as extensions of the fantasies of the ego.A Severed Head is a demonstration of the truth of Iris Murdoch's remark that we live 'in myth and symbol all the time.'[17]

NOTES

1. Possibilities p 233:
'Latterly the society of her books has narrowed socially . . . It has also become a world of strange sexual and moral expectation, of curious fornications, strange sympathies and contacts, and curious unconnectedness, curious ignorances. In short, it has become a convention; there is a recognizable Murdoch-land, with whose geography, mores and erotics we have grown most familiar.'
The first-person novels are Under the Net, A Severed Head, The Italian Girl, The Black Prince, A Word Child, The Sea, The Sea.

2. The Sovereignty of Good p 52. Cited above p 21.

3. Iris Murdoch, A Severed Head (London, 1961) p 252.

4. 'Existentialists and Mystics' p 181. Cited above pp 25-26

5. Under the Net p 256.

6. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, paragraphs 6.41 - 6.413, pp 145, 147: para 4.1212, p 151.

7. I have in mind the parallels between Antonia and Martin when their respective adulteries are revealed.

8. The Italian Girl (London, 1964) p 48.

9. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, paragraph 6.341, p 139.

10. Under the Net pp 90-91. See above pp 47-48.

11. The Italian Girl, p 165. See also p 116 below.

12. Degrees of Freedom p 105.
See also the footnote in Sartre p 63:
'The striking symbol of the petrifying Medusa is interpreted by Freud as a castration fear (Collected Papers, Vol 5). Sartre of course regards as its basic sense our fear of being observed. (L'Etre et le Néant p 502) It is interesting to speculate on how one would set about deciding which interpretation was 'correct'.'

13. Crowds and Power pp 51-52:
'But the severed head of the victim is also a threat. They have looked into those dead eyes with such passion that now they cannot free themselves from him. His head has become part of the crowd and so the crowd itself is struck by death.'
Canetti, of course, is describing the moment when the executioner holds the severed head of his victim aloft to the crowd.

14. Palmer Anderson has already been seen as godlike when they go to the opera; to see Götterdämmerung. Peter Conradi, 'Useful Fictions', Critical Quarterly, 23 (Autumn 1981), 63-69, p 64 comments:
'The inhabitants of Murdoch novels are frequently opera-goers; the operas they see are often wryly chosen to comment momentarily and jokily on their predicament . . . Martin Lynch-Gibbon in A Severed Head finds that his wife and her lover have gone to Götterdämmerung at a point where he too, like mankind in the opera, might reasonably hope for some apocalyptic liberation from the realm of the mythic.'

15. Martin possess a set of Audubon prints. A radio programme 'My Beloved

Birds of America',BBC Radio 4,30 August 1980,on the American water-colourist John James Audubon,claimed that while Audubon was in London about 1830 it was suggested that he smarten himself up to help sell subscriptions to his work.He had his hair,which he wore long,cut and recorded in his diary that the sight of his cut tresses brought to mind the victims of the French Revolution being prepared for the guillotine.

Given the presence of Audubon's prints in the novel,this seems of interest in connection with Georgie Hands's sending Martin her cut head of hair.

16.W.B.Yeats,'Under Ben Bulben',Collected Poems (London,1950) pp 398-399.

17.'Mass,Myth and Might' p 338.

CHAPTER SIX: AN UNOFFICIAL ROSE

The distinction drawn in 'Against Dryness' between the 'crystalline' and the 'journalistic' novel has been much used in the discussion of Iris Murdoch's work, not always particularly helpfully since it tends to suggest some radical divergence between these two modes of writing.[1] The points already made about the importance of ideas in her work and her attempts to find images for her moral ideas should indicate the essential community between the two apparently distinct types. For examples of the distinction of 'crystalline' and 'journalistic' in Iris Murdoch's own work, one need look no further than the differences between A Severed Head and An Unofficial Rose (1962). The tight, comic patterning of the former, its restriction in tone and setting, when set against the latter seem to show a return to the more leisurely, spread out technique of The Bell. But that this is not so, at least as a permanent change, is demonstrated by the style of the later novels. But despite the differences in form between A Severed Head and An Unofficial Rose there is little serious difference in her themes. The difference in style is largely a matter of the point of view of the novels; as pointed out at the start of Chapter Five, the first person narration tends to produce a more obsessive, tightly controlled view of events than does the third person.[2]

As a novel of character An Unofficial Rose fails if what one is looking for is a descendant of the nineteenth century novel, for there is no sense in the book of a fully integrated social world within which the characters move.[3] This is not to say, however, that the novel is a failure, for the world which gives the characters of An Unofficial Rose their identity is not the social world but the inner world of moral activity.[4] As Graham Martin notes:

> (the characters) have other roots than social - the authenticity of the inner life, and the vividness of the mysterious crises they undergo in the course of these novels.[5]

If the crises of the first of Iris Murdoch's novels were the crises which

are associated with some drive for freedom,then the crisis of An Unofficial Rose is concerned with another moral value.This crucial development in her work was commented on retrospectively in answer to a question from W.K.Rose.He asked her if freedom was her 'main subject';she replied:

> "No,not now.I think it might have been in the past.No,I think love is my main subject.I have very mixed feelings about the concept of freedom now.This is partly a philosophical development.I once was a kind of existentialist and now I am a kind of platonist. What I am concerned about really is love,but this sounds very grandiose."[6]

If the novels up to this point have been concerned with various drives for freedom and the discovery that this brings the protagonists into opposition with the reality of the outside world,then An Unofficial Rose is,as A.S,Byatt remarks,'the first sustained effort to come to terms with goodness rather than freedom'.And,it is this,despite her criticism,which accounts for the limited characterisation of some of the figures in the novel.[7]Freedom is not only a lesser moral value than goodness (if,indeed, it is a moral value at all for Iris Murdoch) it also produces a less interesting inner life.

To compare the novel with The Sandcastle is to realise that we are being asked to see events from a different conceptual position.In the earlier novel,Bill Mor's inability to break free from the conventional world of his marriage is seen ,at least partly (by Demoyte for instance), as a failure of will and nerve.The voice of Bledyard does not carry sufficient conviction to completely outweigh more worldly views.But in An Unofficial Rose the same failure to break out of a marriage that has become a shell is seen as a positive moral activity.Ann Peronett's refusal to assert her will,her acceptance of the need to love Randall hopelessly, and her sacrifice of possible happiness with Felix Meacham,are seen as acts of selflessness,as exercises of love.And if The Sandcastle lacks an authoritative image of the good,the An Unofficial Rose possesses one in Hugh's Tintoretto,the selling of which is seen as a moral crime which

matches Randall's abandonment of Ann.Indeed,it provides the means for him to leave her.

The patterning of An Unofficial Rose is a conceptual matter,as A.S. Byatt notes,but it is not,as she seems to suggest,a limitation in the novel's organisation.[8] The search for 'form' which characterises the activities of almost all the characters except Ann is the product of the will.The desire for form tries to deny the contingent world its existence and validity. Jake,in Under the Net wants everything to have a 'sufficient reason', and Randall's desire for form distorts the world in much the same way. The complication in this novel is that the mechanical world initiated by Randall keeps running foul of one initiated by somebody else.The mechanisms set going by Randall,or by Hugh,or Mildred (and possibly Lindsay),do not achieve their ends because they reveal only the mechanism of Emma Sands, the writer of detective stories - a professional spinner of plots - or of others.Even Ann's own belief that she has succeeded in releasing Felix is seen to be the result,at least in part,of Miranda's manipulation;the irony is complete,for the Shakespearian innocent is the most ruthless manipulator of them all,and the brave new world which she sees is one in which survival is possible only by the use of such techniques.

But this survival is not freedom.Indeed,the novel dramatises the fundamental problem of the Sartrean approach to relationships.[9] Since one must inevitably find other people an obstacle in the way of one's self-projection,the logical position for the existentialist to take is to either accept domination from the other,or to dominate oneself.An Unofficial Rose presents a finely polished image of Sartre's world.It reveals freedom as fundamentally an immoral concept,and in doing so it shows us that the acceptance of human difference and individuality ,even though it may not accord with one's happiness,is the true direction of morality.

An Unofficial Rose postulates the existence of something beyond the shadow play of motive and the will.Ann's decision 'not to know' herself, not to examine her own motivation and will and to adhere to the sacraments of marriage is,however,presented as something of an anachronism.It is a

museum piece.That goodness is somehow unavailable in the world of the novel is also suggested by the fact that Hugh's Tintoretto ends up in a museum. It has a place in The National Gallery which it has lost in his life. Similarly,the rose nursery,also a symbol of the possibilities of the moral life,rejects the formlessness of the 'unofficial rose' for the pursuit, as Randall sees it,

> of the lurid,the metallic,the startling and the new . . . The true rose,the miracle of nature,owed nothing to the hand of man.[10]

Randall may regret this,and finds his new free life with Lindsay unsatisfying, but he has committed himself to it,and survives in an unsatisfactory moral limbo.

An Unofficial Rose opens with a funeral during which the lines of the burial service toll out the key points of Iris Murdoch's philosophy:that life is governed by mortality and chance;that

> man walketh in a vain shadow,and disquieteth himself in vain:he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.(p 14)

Hugh reflects that Fanny,his late wife,had remained mysterious to him throughout her life,and that he had never known her heart.For Randall,at the opening of the novel,Ann has become 'invisible',and we have here a suggestion of the inability of the men of will to see beyond themselves to appreciate others.For Hugh,as for Iris Murdoch,there is no consoling after-life;the moral effort must be made in this life or not at all.The religious service,though it can point out the ultimate insignificance of man's life,cannot compensate for the pointless arbitrariness of it all.

Not only Fanny,but Steve,Ann and Randall's son,has died,and this death too is recalled by Hugh at his wife's funeral:

> Steve's death had been something gratuitous and wicked,and Hugh had raved at the universe in vain to find a place to pin that wickedness down.(p 16)

These deaths suggest that the world is beyond the understanding of those who live by the will,and yet the only answer that they have is to assert their wills.Randall feels that Ann's formlessness,which is a kind of

acceptance of the place of contingency in the world,prevents him from achieving any kind of form himself.His wish to make the world run to his pattern is seen later as the wish of the mediocre artist to contain and control the world rather than to celebrate its existence,and his hatred of Ann reflects his dissatisfaction with himself.He does not,in his escape, gain freedom with Lindsay,because of what he is:

> What had impeded him was,he was fairly sure,not the demon of morality.It was more like some restless rapacity,a rapacity such as is the mark of the mediocre in art.The great artist is not rapacious.Randall felt restless,he wanted,now more than ever,to have everything.(p 316)

Such an egocentric view of the world is bound to lead to such disappointment.Its wish to dominate,to possess,makes it vulnerable to other similar attempts which may be more successful.And so Randall discovers, as does Hugh,that what he thought he had done seems to have been done by Emma Sands.

> He was still unsure what had happened,but he knew that he had been defeated.Emma had made it appear that even this had been decided, had been arranged by her and Lindsay.Even here he was excluded, even here his action was stolen from him.(p 208)

The world inhabited by Randall,Hugh and the other plotters and schemers is a world driven by the machinery of the ego.It is characteristic of the blindness of these egotists that although they may see this is true of others they can never recognize it of themselves.Randall consoles himself that the arrangement of his life by Emma is an illusion,'a cheap magician's trick'.Hugh,too,is disconcerted to find 'Emma claiming to have done what he thought he had done'.Although they may be startled to find that this is so,they show no awareness of the moral dimension of such interference, nor,of course,do they see that their own activities are the same in kind, but merely less successful.It is only Felix,that curiously old-fashioned 'officer and gentleman',who shows moral awareness.Mildred tells him how Randall can be bought off,thus freeing Ann for Felix,and Hugh for herself:

> He wished heartily that Mildred had not consulted him.She had now given him,against his will,a glimpse of the machinery;and the pattern which was emerging,with what she wished him to think of as necessity,was the more alarming since it was also so attractive. (p 197)

Felix recognises the moral difficulties involved with the mechanists' approach,but he also sees the attractiveness of it because it does give him some hope of achieving Ann.Ironically,despite his name,he gets least out of the operation of the whole novel,rejected by Ann in what he sees, interestingly enough,as a mechanical fashion.

> "You mean," he tried to read her face rather than her words,"that I've become - with you - invisible? You can't see me - because I'm - simply something that you want?" He feared to put it too clearly. But that he should be so almost mechanically renounced with the renunciation of her own will seemed to him too cruel.He was to be destroyed,with her,by the sheer overbrimming existence of the absent Randall.(p 301)

That Felix feels that Ann's rejection of him is mechanical suggests two separate things.Firstly,that her action is not her own,as she later realizes, recognizing that it is Miranda's act which has separated them and that she 'had been part of someone else's scheme,a thought,almost,of someone else's mind'.(p 339) Secondly,it suggests some limitation on her goodness.

That Ann should discover that the one act which she believed to be her own should actually be the result of Miranda's machinations is,of course, consistent with the discoveries made by most of the other characters in the novel.What is different is that she does not attempt to protect herself from this by pretending that the discovery is some kind of illusion.Ann faces fairly and squarely this fact ,and in not turning it on its head and maintaining the fantasy that she has exercised control,she is clearly morally superior to any of the other characters.In a way that none of the others are able to,Ann can accept the contingent in the world.Unlike Randall,she has accepted Steve's death and can let Penn Graham have Steve's toy soldiers

know can be seen as carrying the full weight of Iris Murdoch's ethical theory is another matter.It is true that,despite everything,she loves Randall, but there are some important qualifications to be made about that love.

In a conversation with Douglas Swann,the vicar,Ann says that her love exasperated Randall.Swann replies:

> "You must enclose him in a net of goodness and loving kindness."
>
> The image of the enraged Randall so trammelled almost made Ann laugh . . .
>
> "I don't know about that.My love for Randall is terribly imperfect.. I can't see it having any miraculous effect!"
>
> "Most of our love is shabby stuff," said Douglas."But there is always a thin line of gold,the bit of pure love on which all the rest depends - and which redeems all the rest." (p 133)

The point here is that Ann's love is imperfect,and is felt to be so throughout the novel.It is true that she can accept the contingent and that she continues to love her husband,but she fails to see Felix Meacham accurately, and consequently fails the really hard test of dealing justly with him. Because of this she does not do justice to herself either.

Of course,this is an easy assertion.But the particular problem is intractable in the extreme.Indeed,it is a perfect example of the particular sort of difficulty which moral problems present,a fact that Iris Murdoch is well aware of.[11] Because Ann cannot cope with the demands made by her situation she too,as well as Randall,Hugh and the others,merely 'survives' at the end of the novel,and this,in the context of <u>An Unofficial Rose</u>, suggests rather a bleakly unsatisfying future.[12]

One can see Ann as having achieved the partial enlightenment of the prisoners in Plato's cave who have been released from their chains and can now see the fire as well as the shadows on the wall.She is aware of the necessity of abandoning the self,and has reached a stage of enlightenment that enables her to perceive the fact that the self is the light by which most individuals live in the world.But she has not managed to leave the cave and reach the upper air and the sunlight.At the conclusion of <u>The Fire and the Sun</u>,Iris Murdoch remarks,

> To know oneself <u>in the world</u> (as part of it,subject to it, connected with it) is to have the firmest grasp of the real.[13]

Ann's total refusal to 'know herself' renders her incapable of attaining this high ideal,although her rejection of self-analysis as a substitute for it shows that she is following the correct path.But she is still,at the end of the book,'compelled' by her whole life not to achieve Felix,and the consequent loss of joy,of which she is well aware,implies that she has failed in some way to respond to the essentially creative demands of Eros:

> Eros is the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels of the soul and through which we are able to turn towards reality. This is the fundamental force which can release the prisoners and draw them toward the higher satisfactions of light and freedom.[14]

It is this active force which is represented in the novel by Hugh's Tintoretto,which 'glowed . . . with a jewelled beneficence.It lighted the room now,like a small sun.'(p 98) The painting is sold by Hugh as a means of purchasing his own and Randall's illusory freedom -, a fine image of the abandonment of good by these characters.But the possibility of goodness remains,not possessed by any one character,but available in The National Gallery.That Ann has no contact with the painting throughout the novel is surely significant,she neither abandons it nor is she touched by its power.

If <u>An Unofficial Rose</u> is Iris Murdoch's first sustained effort to come to terms with goodness then it is by no means unequivocal.The impossible distance of the perfect is stressed,although Ann makes sufficient moral progress to indicate that the concept has meaning as a goal for mankind.But the novel implies the prevalence of the broadly existentialist view of the world held,in Iris Murdoch's view,by contemporary society.[15] The fact that Miranda is the inheritor of the world of the novel,and that she has learnt,perhaps too well,to love the violence inherent in her father, and that she can manipulate Ann and Felix so successfully,does not suggest that the movement to the upper air will be easily accomplished.It is perhaps significant that in this novel the spokesman for the good should be the Reverend Douglas Swann,and that his message should fail to encompass

the complexity of the moral world in which Ann finds herself.Swann,with his belief in the life hereafter and the existence of God is felt to be something of an anachronism,like Ann's belief in the sanctity of the marriage sacraments.He speaks to the past,but is unable to offer real guidance on the moral points that arise for Ann.For Iris Murdoch,too,there are still conceptual points to be clarified if the moral world is to be seen as authoritative but not dependent upon the existence of God.

NOTES

1.'Against Dryness' p 18.Cited above p 28.
See,for instance,Frank Baldanza,Iris Murdoch (New York,1974),p 20.

2.See above pp 82-83.

3.See 'Against Dryness' p18.

4.See The Sovereignty of Good pp17-23 and above pp 15-16 and p 70.

5.'Iris Murdoch and the Symbolist Novel' p 298.

6.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p58.Cited above pp 10,23.

7.Degrees of Freedom p 124:
'in so far as it consists of two opposed sets of characters . . .(the rapacious or violent and the conventional or good) . . . it is only the second group who have the life which the novel at its best demands.'

8.Degrees of Freedom p 125.

9.See Being and Nothingness p 364:
'Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well.While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other,the Other is trying to free himself from mine;while I seek to enslave the Other,the Other seeks to enslave me.We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself,but with reciprocal and moving relations.The following descriptions of concrete behaviour must therefore be envisaged within the perspective of conflict. Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others.'

10.Iris Murdoch,An Unofficial Rose (London,1962) p 218.

11.See The Sovereignty of Good p 100:
'We cannot then sum up human excellence for these reasons:the world is aimless,chancy and huge,and we are blinded by self.There is a third consideration which is a relation of the other two.It is difficult to look at the sun:it is not like looking at other things.'

12.The Disciplined Heart p 181:
'Anne can claim no decisively taken acts,her negativity allows her to survive only in a marginal human state.Conversely,the machinations of Emma Sands,Mildred Finch,and probably Miranda as well,amount to little more than marginal survival,in the last analysis.Utterly different kinds of personal value,and personal conduct,then,yield a curiously identical result.'

13.The Fire and the Sun p 84.

14.The Fire and the Sun p 34.

15.See 'Against Dryness' p 17 and also 'Existentialists and Mystics' p 172.

CHAPTER SEVEN:THE UNICORN

Although at the time it may have appeared to be outside the main line of Iris Murdoch's development as a novelist,it is possible to see,with the benefit of hindsight,that The Unicorn (1963) is in many ways more typical of her work than is The Bell.With its far more conscious use of Platonism as a moral foundation,and its open recognition of a spiritual dimension to experience,it is a novel which shows clearly the change in value that Iris Murdoch was to comment on later:

> When I was young I thought,as all young people do,that freedom was the thing.Later on I felt that virtue was the thing.[1]

And to explore this more ancient concept Iris Murdoch adopted the archaic world of the Gothic novel,thus ennabling her to pit the ancient world of classical thought against contemporary sensibility.As Elizabeth MacAndrew notes of the Gothic novel of the eighteenth century:

> The Gothic authors,writing a new type of romance that would free the imagination of the author and engage the emotion of the reader, consciously wrote fantasy in the face of the rising taste for the social novel . . . Through the isolated world,ostensibly remote in space and time,the Gothic novels explore the dark aspects of the mind and,through their characters,they locate that world within everyday experience.[2]

The remoteness of the world of The Unicorn is not that of time,but its physical remoteness,its strangeness and hostility to the characters who come from outside stress the unusualness of the moral experience which is to be encountered there.Unusual,that is,to a modern sensibility.Those who inhabit the world of Gaze and Riders accept the morality of their world as the norm.If not a romance through its setting in a different time, it is,as Robert Scholes remarked,'a romance of ideas',[3]its setting being an ancient moral world where concepts such as suffering and truth are of more significance that freedom.

In view of the distance from contemporary sensibility of the moral

world of Gaze,it is not surprising that Marian experiences it as a work of art.Scholes remarks that 'Marian and Effingham come from the "real" world into Gaze,just as we readers come into a work of fiction',[4] but the work of art that Marian feels she has experienced is not a novel,but a tragic play.

> With the return to Gaze she felt again her connection with the house and with the drama it had contained.But she felt towards it rather as one who is leaving the theatre after some tragic play,worn,torn,yet rejoiced and set free with a new appetite for the difficult world.[5]

If,in the other novels,works of art,as manifestations of the good,stand outside the actual events of the story and exert their authority from a distance,then in The Unicorn the moral authority lies in the events themselves,and characters show their moral awareness by their involvement in the drama.Max,the inheritor at Gaze,simply watches the unfolding drama with imaginative sympathy.Marian will 'all her life she would,with differences, be re-enacting that story' (p 311),but Effingham Cooper leaves unable to share in the experience:

> He was the angel who drew the curtain upon the mystery,remaining himself outside in the great lighted auditorium,where the clatter of departure and the sound of ordinary talk was coming now to be heard.He sighed again and closed his eyes upon the appalling land.(p319)

In 'The Sublime and the Good',Iris Murdoch proposes a 'pocket history of literature' through the idea of freedom.Although she calls it a 'toy' it has some relevance to The Unicorn.She suggests five categories of freedom in her history:

> Tragic freedom . . .freedom as an exercise of the imagination in an unreconciled conflict of dissimilar beings.It belongs to . . . the Greeks.The literary form is tragic drama.
>
> Medieval freedom.Here the individual is seen as a creature within a partly described hierarchy of theological reality.The literary forms are religious tales,allegory,morality plays.

Kantian freedom.This belongs to the Enlightenment.The individual is seen as a non-historical rational being moving towards complete agreement with other rational beings.The literary forms are rationalist allegories and novels of ideas.

Hegelian freedom . . . The individual is now thought of as part of a total historical society and takes his importance from his role in that society.The literary form is the true novel.

Romantic freedom . . . The individual is seen as solitary and as having importance in and by himself . . . The literary form is the neurotic modern novel.[6]

In a sense,the progress of Marian Taylor through The Unicorn is a reverse chronology of this 'toy'.Of course,the fit is not perfect,but Marian comes to Gaze from the modern world talking of the need for freedom. She leaves aware of the tragic pattern involved,and carrying the significance of that pattern with her.

The central concept of The Unicorn is that of suffering.It is associated with guilt.And one of the major difficulties of the novel is that these concepts are not attached to any particular set of actions. Hannah's crime,if that is what it is,is sufficiently distanced in time (it happened seven years ago),and in particularity (what exactly did she do,and in what circumstances?),that it is hard to identify guilt on her part.But this is not really a weakness of the novel,for by the difficulty of seeing Hannah's position we are brought to share the difficulty of Marian and Effingham in understanding the moral world they find themselves in.Like them,we come carrying the baggage of the contemporary world,trailing clouds of concepts which simply obscure the truth to be discovered at Gaze.Shortly after her arrival Denis Nolan tells Marian:

"You cannot come between her and her suffering,it is too complicated,too precious.We must play her game,whatever it is,

and believe her beliefs.That is all we can do for her."

"Well,it's not what I'm going to do," said Marian."I'm going to talk to her about freedom." (p 76)

But Marian's talk of freedom impresses nobody at Gaze except Effingham Cooper,and their attempt to set Hannah free ends in the abortive escape by car.This is a parody gothic abduction,which,by its absurdity,shows the inadequacy of concepts of freedom to this ancient world.

Marian attempts to make Hannah belong to a different pattern from the one which controls Gaze.She sees her role as being Gerald Scottow's opposite:'by wrestling with Scottow she would make her way into the story' (p 76).At this point Marian sees the world of Gaze as a personal drama,and if that drama is not exactly an egotistic fantasy,as is Randall Peronett's for instance,then it is morally solipsistic.[7]Marian cannot see any values other than those she imports to Gaze.She is also unable to swim in the sea,an image of her inability to lose the self.[8] If Marian is to stay at Gaze,she must,as Scottow tells her,submit to the pattern of the place, and as a consequence see that the values she has brought are not the ones most appropriate to it.Paradoxically,it is through her attempt to save Hannah that Marian learns this.She sees that she herself is guilty of Hannah's death because she has introduced the alien concept of freedom into the restricted world of Gaze.Her acceptance of this guilt enables her to see the story as a tragic drama in which she has become a perpetual participant.She has found that she is subject to the ancient concept of Ate,the almost automatic transfer of guilt and suffering to others. Marian leaves the novel,not,like Orestes,pursued by the Furies,but with a sense of the moral universe,a universe in which freedom is not a significant concept.

The moral universe of <u>The Unicorn</u> is articulated by Max Lejour,the Platonic philosopher who lives at neighbouring Riders.[10] As commented earlier,Max does nothing active in the novel,he simply gives Gaze his attention,thereby doing what its name implies one should do.Max's

contemplation of Gaze has resulted in a juster view of Hannah than is available to those who try to act before understanding.Max's appearance in the novel is heralded by the sound of him chanting

> the healing familiar lines.
>
> "Zeus,who leads men into the ways of understanding,has established the rule that we must learn by suffering.As sad care, with memories of pain,comes dropping upon the heart in sleep,so even against our will does wisdom come upon us."(p 95)[11]

Max's attention to Hannah's situation has at least led him to appreciate the fundamental ambiguity involved.He may not be sure what it is that she is,but he has got the terms of the discussion correct.Max's love for Hannah is not tainted by his being 'in love' with her,as,in a sense, both Marian's and Effingham's love is. That is why he can be the inheritor of Gaze,the 'person she (Hannah) was waiting for' as Alice puts it (p 302). It is Max who embodies the love which redeems,according to one critic at least:

> Her protagonists,therefore,can redeem themselves only by discovering new ways of seeing reality and by resisting the false consolations of form and fantasy which Murdoch defines as the 'enemy' of that true imagination which is 'Love,an exercise of the imagination'.[12]

The 'enemy' in this case is Effingham's and Marian's conception of freedom. When he visits Max in his room,Effingham remarks that Gaze feels like a police state:

> "It makes one notice the free society when one gets back to it."
>
> "The free society? That rag freedom! Freedom may be a value in politics,but it's not a value in morals.Truth,yes.But not freedom.That's a flimsy idea,like happiness.In morals,we are all prisoners,but the name of our cure is not freedom."

Max continues:

"Plato tells us that of all the things which belong to the spiritual world beauty is the one which is most easily seen here below.We can see wisdom only darkly.But we can see beauty quite plainly, whoever we are,and we don't need to be trained to love it.And because beauty is a spiritual thing it commands worship rather than arousing desire.That is the meaning of Courtly Love.Hannah is beautiful and her story is as you say 'somehow beautiful'.But of course unless there are other virtues,other values,such worship can become corrupt." (pp 114-115)

That the central idea behind this is Plato's myth of the cave is obvious. Hannah's imprisonment is an individual manifestation of the position of the prisoners in the cave.She,as they,can be saved not by false conceptions of freedom,but by the truth,the light of the sun.But the fact that she arouses such desires to free her is also at the heart of the matter.Her ambiguity,which Max can perceive (as is indicated by his wondering whether she may not be an enchantress,'a Circe,a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved' (p 116)) is related to the fact that she embodies the idea of suffering in the novel.Max again:

"In a way we can't help using her as a scapegoat.In a way that's what she's for and to recognize it is to do her honour.She is our image of the significance of suffering.But we must also see her as real.And that will make us suffer too." (p 115)

Whether Hannah is the unicorn,the image of Christ,or whether she is Circe, to a large extent depends upon the concepts that can be brought to bear upon her situation.We should recall here Iris Murdoch's idea that we can only see within the conceptual world that we have[13],and note that the conceptual world of Effingham and Marian is limited until,in the case of Marian,it is broadened by the experiences she undergoes at Gaze.

Even in the ancient world of Gaze the existentialist drive for individual significance is to be found.Hannah,late in the novel,remarks that she has played at being God,and that everyone's belief in the significance of her suffering has kept her going.(p 258) But in this she

is demonstrating the existence of the concept of Ate.She is not good enough to fail to pass the suffering on.That Denis Nolan takes on the burden is an image of the very fact that Iris Murdoch claims is most characteristic of the good:that it is unimaginable,beyond the reach of humanity,perfect.And yet,by her seven years trial,though she fails,Hannah proves that the concept has meaning,and that through unimaginable effort men may come to unite themselves with the god that Max defines as the Good:

> "Good is the distant source of light.It is the unimaginable object of our desire.Our fallen nature knows only its name and its perfection.That is the idea that has been vulgarised by existentialists and linguistic philosophers when they make good into a mere matter of personal choice.It cannot be defined,not because it is a function of our freedom,but because we do not know it."(p 117)

(This reads like part of The Sovereignty of Good rather than part of a novel; and that fact shows the close relationship between philosophy and fiction for Iris Murdoch.)

We have here an explanation of the unspecified guilt and suffering which are the subject of the book.To say that what is being advanced here is a non-religious idea of original sin is to remove the mysteriousness and elusiveness of the original,but it is what it amounts to.All men suffer from the sin of self,and they suffer from their very fallen nature. Denis Nolan puts it thus to Marian;he is speaking of the bravery of the salmon.Marian says,

> "Brave fish.Yes.I remember Hannah saying that once.She said their going up the rivers was like souls trying to approach God."
>
> "They are certainly possessed by a strange desire."
>
> "But to suffer so much -"
>
> "Suffering is no scandal.It is natural.Nature appoints it.All creation suffers.It suffers from having been created,if nothing else.It suffers from being divided from God." (p 235)

If the guilt of man is his ever present self,then his suffering is that because of this he cannot achieve the Good.Hannah,after the expiration

of her seven years,is not purified.She remains the ordinary guilty person who Max sees,and she repeats her original crime by giving herself to Gerald Scottow.As a result she shoots him,then commits suicide, choosing freedom from Gaze not as a moral value,but as an admission of moral failure.

That failure should be so consistently general in the novel is perhaps a reflection of its highly developed insistence on the spiritual nature of moral growth and on the unfamiliarity of such a concept in the contemporary world.Iris Murdoch herself commented that this novel and The Time of the Angels have 'a kind of religious or metaphysical conception at the very root of the idea'[14]. The later novel too is full of failures to achieve moral progress. In both of these books,suicide is one answer;another is a deliberate failure to learn,a retreat into the moral morass of the self. In The Unicorn this is symbolised by Effingham Cooper's excursion into the bog,as he wanders away from Gaze after failing to rescue Hannah.The failure of the plan is also the product of vanity,as he has left a letter explaining the plan which has been opened early.Alice prevents him from taking Hannah because she is in love with him herself.The whole incident is an absurd demonstration of the mechanical responses of the self.

Effingham wanders off into the bog,and,reflecting on evil as a dark force which can inhabit human beings,sinks into it.Waitng for what seems certain death he has a revelation:

> As if obeying some imperative,a larger imperative than he had ever acknowledged before,he collected himself and concentrated his attention;yet what he was concentrating on was blackness too, a very dark central blackness . . .
>
> Something had been withdrawn,had slipped away from him in the moment of his attention and that something was simply himself.It came to him with the simplicity of a simple sum.What was left was everything else,all that was not himself,that object which he had never seen before and upon which he now gazed with the passion of a lover . . . Since he was mortal he was nothing and since he

was nothing all that was not himself was filled to the brim with being and it was from this that the light streamed.This then was love,to look and look until one exists no more,this was the love which was the same as death.He looked,and knew with a clarity which was one with the increasing light,that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love.(pp 197 198)

But although when faced with death,Effingham can achieve the clearest moral vision of the novel,he cannot sustain it,nor can he communicate its importance to anybody else.[15] He is saved from the implications of the vision by his own 'monumental egoism',and dismisses the events of his time at Gaze as 'a fantasy of the spiritual life' (p 317) as he travels back to the 'real' world.

In the responses of Effingham and Marian,The Unicorn shows two reactions to the new/old moral world which it displays.We can reject it as a fantasy,like Effingham,or we can carry it with us and re-enact it,as does Marian.The difference rests on the value that is given to the 'play' of the novel.The strangeness of the world of The Unicorn is no accident, nor is it a retreat into 'fantasy-myth' as A S.Byatt suggests.[16] It is a genuine effort to record what Richard Wasson calls a 'new sensibility'[17] to explore in a Godless world what form the spiritual life might take. That Effingham cannot learn from this and that Marian can indicates their openness to new experience.Marian's idealism and enthusiasm for life, enable her to learn to see what is there.Effingham cannot do this.He leaves untouched by the good:

> That vision,true or false,he would leave to Max,of the good forced into being as the object of desire,as if one should compel God to be.He himself would hurry back to his familiar ordinary world. (p 318)

In his inability to see the metaphysical dimension of reality even when it is before him,Effingham is like the rationalist protagonists of Sheridan Le Fanu's In a Glass Darkly.Mr Justice Harbottle,in one of Le Fanu's stories,sees his own trial as a dream rather than as the spiritual

intrusion upon his normal world which his own actions have caused.Le Fanu's influence upon The Unicorn is not merely that of a gothic world of guilt but that both Iris Murdoch's novel and In a Glass Darkly insist upon some additional dimension to reality.But whereas Le Fanu presents no explanation of these intrusions of the spirit world,The Unicorn suggests that the spiritual grows out of a perception of reality.[18]

It is this,then,which is significant about The Unicorn.It prefigures the second thoughts about the existence of God which are the subject of the essay 'Existentialists and Mystics',and it does so in a way which is consistent with the belief expressed in 'Against Dryness' that we need 'a non-religious sense of the transcendence of reality'.[19]What is different from the formulation of this essay is,of course,that this transcendence is decidedly metaphysical.That there is change in Iris Murdoch's thought is not surprising,but that she can provide powerful images of the moral reality which she perceives is a tribute to her skill as a novelist.

NOTES

1.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 179.

2.Elizabeth MacAndrew,The Gothic Tradition in Fiction (Columbia,1979) pp 37-38.

3.Fabulation and Metafiction p 56.

4.Fabulation and Metafiction p 63.

5.Iris Murdoch,The Unicorn (London,1963),p 242.

6.'The Sublime and the Good' p 53.

7.See Alan Kennedy,The Protean Self:Dramatic Action in Contemporary Fiction, (London and Basingstoke,1974),p 281:
He comments that Iris Murdoch identifies 'drama' with solipsistic struggles 'Because 'dramatic' means for Murdoch the internal struggle of self with itself;the dramatic therefore takes no notice of what is without.'

8.See Crowds and Power,p 81,cited above p 58.See also Under the Net pp 118-119 cited above p 51,and also the other novels listed under note 8,p 56 above.

9.Howard German,'The Range of Allusions in the Novels of Iris Murdoch', Journal of Modern Literature,2 (September 1971),57-85,points out that the preoccupation with guilt suggests the Orestia and that the sequence of action in the novel follows Act Three of The Flies,Sartre's version of Aeschylus.However,Sartre's play has Orestes taking the guilt of the city upon himself because he is 'free' and chooses to do so.This is not what The Unicorn involves.

10.Wolfe,The Disciplined Heart,p 188,sees The Unicorn as Iris Murdoch's most overtly Platonic novel:
'The Unicorn can be labelled a search for absolutes like goodness and truth in a relative,contingent world.'
He is right here about Plato,but wrong about the 'relative' world.The world of Gaze supports the Platonic equation of love and knowledge,but it is the contemporary world which believes values to be relative,although Marian discovers that this is not so.

11.This appears to be a translation of a part of the first Chorus from Aeschylus,Agamemnon.The translation is probably Iris Murdoch own (she studied Greats at Oxford),but compares reasonably well with the following:
'it is Zeus who has put men on the way to wisdom by establishing as a valid law 'By suffering they shall win understanding'.Instead of sleep there trickles before the heart the pain of remembrance of suffering: even to the unwilling discretion comes.'
Aeschylus,Agamemnon,translated by Eduard Fraenkel (Oxford,1950) p 101 (lines 176-181).

12.Zoreh T.Sullivan,'The Contracting Universe of Iris Murdoch's Gothic Novels',Modern Fiction Studies,23 (Winter 1977/1978),557-569 (p 558).

13.The Sovereignty of Good p 37.Cited above p 20.

14.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 64.

15.Graham Martin comments,'Iris Murdoch and the Symbolist Novel',p 299:
'She makes the vision entirely private - any general illumination going beyond Cooper's experience must be discovered by the reader.She also makes Cooper forget it in a way that leaves the reader puzzled as to

whether the vision of death was more than a frightened man's physical reaction to the actual circumstances of sinking into mud.'
Such a view may have been tenable in 1965,but subsequent publications, particularly Bruno's Dream (1969),make it clear that the equation of love with the death of the self is meant as a true vision of the ethical position.(See Bruno's Dream pp 291-293 and below p 149.)

16. Degrees of Freedom p 146.

17. Richard Wasson,'Notes on a New Sensibility',Partisan Review,36 (Autumn 1969),460-477.
Wasson,like Scholes (see above p 100),sees Iris Murdoch in the company of such writers as John Barth,Thomas Pynchon and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

18. Sheridan Le Fanu,In a Glass Darkly,(London 1884).
A.S.Byatt (Degrees of Freedom p 147) claims that Iris Murdoch has likened the novel to the work of Le Fanu.

19. 'Against Dryness' p 19.

CHAPTER EIGHT:THE ITALIAN GIRL

The Italian Girl (1964) is not one of Iris Murdoch's more successful novels.It shares with The Unicorn a certain gothic quality,but lacks that work's sense of an alien and ancient world.By contrast with The Unicorn the action of The Italian Girl often seems simply bizarre.

Nonetheless,it is an attempt to explore ,without the overt philosophising which occured in The Unicorn,the philosophical position which Iris Murdoch has come to occupy.[1]That it is something less than a success may indicate the importance of philosophical underpinning to her work,for The Italian Girl significantly lacks those philosophical (in the broadest sense) setpieces that are so often important passages in her novels.Because of this it fails to provide us with the concepts to see the events of the novel in a new focus.It encourages us to use concepts which do not match the moral focus of the rest of her work.In her interview with W.K.Rose, Iris Murdoch commented:

> "I'm not Freudian.I think that Freud discovered a lot of things, but I think this whole business of sexuality and spirituality is very much more ambiguous and hard to understand."[2]

And yet The Italian Girl presents a situation in which a broadly based type of Freudian discussion would be appropriate.The Narraway brothers' mother,Lydia,has recently died,and she is said by the narrator to have

> early turned away from her husband and focused with rapacious violence upon her sons,with whom she had,as it were,a series of love affairs,transfering the centre of her affection to and fro between us.[3]

(The narrator,Edmund,is one of the sons.)

Otto,the elder of the brothers,remarks apropos of their eating habits, 'I expect it something to do with Lydia,Most things about us are!'(p 48)

It is hard to resist the drift towards a pseudo-Freudian analysis which such comments encourage.But to move in that direction is to follow,however, the characters own tendency to introspection and self absorption,rather

than to open the horizons beyond the self.

As in The Unicorn,the characters of The Italian Girl nearly all feel themselves to be prisoners,unable to escape from a situation which binds them in somehow.The binding force appears to be the dead mother,Lydia, and her power,even after her death,extends not just to her two sons, but to the rest of the household as well.Yet each of those who is held in this way is unable to see the situation of any of the others.The tendency of all of the family to use Freudian patterns of explanation is an indication of this self-absorption.Isabel,Edmund's sister-in-law, feels that she and Maggie,the servant whom they call the Italian girl, can do nothing for each other because of the effect that Lydia has had. Isabel sees her as having taken everything and having left behind her a group of ruined people.Even Edmund,whom Isabel believes to have escaped from the power of his mother because he has left home,knows that he carries Lydia with him.That this has prevented him from having satisfactory relationships with women is acknowledged,but in terms that are important:

> I lived a solitary life.It had not always been so.But my relations with women always followed a certain disastrous and finally familiar pattern.I did not need a psychoanalyst to tell me why:nor did it occur to me to seek the aid of one of those modern necromancers. I preferred to suffer the thing that I was.(p 28)

Edmund's dismissal of the need for psychoanalysis should lead in turn to some other set of concepts by which the effect of Lydia can be judged.But although it is clear that her effect on the household has been similar to that of other power figures in the novels,such as Mischa Fox in The Flight from the Enchanter,there is no clearly defined set of alternatives.

Both the Narraway bothers are artists:Edmund is a woodcarver,and Otto a stonemason..And yet their mother has had 'nothing of the artist in her'(p 18) turning her energies to the power of control rather than the insight and attention to something outside the self which characterises the artist.The concern with self of the Narraway brothers is seen to be having a detrimental effect upon their work,and their artistic abilities to

perceive their position in the world remain potential rather than actual throughout the novel.Their sense of guilt leads them to ignore the moral value of the external world and to become literally incapable of dealing with any external affairs.Edmund cannot respond to Flora's appeal for his help;Otto cannot break out of his enslavement and deal with either his work or his wife.They suffer,but they do not suffer 'in the truth' (a phrase which has recurrent significance in the novel) because they do not acknowledge the discrete,independent existence of others,nor are they fully aware of their own mortality.

Any movement towards truth,'the kind of suffering that one can't even imagine now' (p 52) as Otto puts it,is hampered by a variety of fantasies and enchantments,which are manifestations of the moral solipsism of the Narraway family.It is perhaps the novel's greatest weakness that the varieties of evil,or of the ego,are hardly presented with the strength to convince.Edmund Narraway,the narrator,does not possess the same power to distort the realities of the world as do some of the later first person narrators; nor does his intervention generate the comedy that Jake Donoghue's does,nor does he exhibit the civilized complacency of Martin Lynch-Gibbon.In the supporting characters,too,there is a similar weakness.David Levkin,in many ways the most successful of them,lacks the demonic energy and sheer joy in manipulation that is found in Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat,although as an image of the dangerous narcissistic aspects of freedom he is effective.But shorn of any kind of philosophical or conceptual framework there is little sense of the characters involved in any moral struggle.

The fantasy that Edmund brings to his family home is that he is some kind of healer,the good man who can sort out the tangles of his family.This is supported by the family themselves,who want him to play this role,and,although he knows,at moments,that he is not a ggod man,he is attracted by the role,and attempts to fill it.However,as is the case with Flora's pregnancy,he finds himself too often shocked by the sexual relations among the family and their hangers-on and judges them rather

than giving them the attention they require.That he is no better than Otto or Isabel,though,is made clear by the way that he too falls for the grubby enchantment of Elsa,David Levkin's sister.

Elsa is the other side of her brother,both in that she attracts the men of the family,while David seduces the women,but also because in her the freedom that David suggests,and which has in him a kind of personal magic,appears as a kind of tawdriness.Her affair with Otto is seen as a debased kind of paradise.Edmund,typically judgemental,calls them 'Adam and Eve,the circle out of which sprang all our woes'.(p 81) It is part of the fantasy that Elsa produces that Otto should feel 'in the truth' with her,for the relationship does nothing to extract Otto from his slothful lack of awareness.It is indeed ironic that through Elsa,or at least through the fact of her death,things can change.

In a novel which largely lacks those strikingly elaborate scenes which Frank Kermode called 'technical excursions'[4],Elsa's death in her 'fire dance' (Chapter 16) has a certain power as she scatters logs from the fire in Isabel's bedroom,and dies in the ensuing blaze.It is as if she is consumed by the forces which she herself has helped to build up, and her destruction by them is (in terms of organisation) the most satisfying thing that is done in the novel.It is also the only occasion of any extended re-thinking in the novel.Its suddenness and unexpectedness provokes the reorientation at the novel's end,David Levkin's leaving and the dissolution of the household.All these actions stem from what Edmund calls the family having seen

> too much about mortality and chance,too much about the consequences of our actions,too much about the real nature of the world.(p 184)

He sees that they have killed Elsa ,somehow,collectively.And by this they are all freed to see both themselves and the world that they have made.

Directly following Elsa's fire dance,Edmund rushes out to follow Flora,followed by the Italian girl.In the darkness of the evening Maggie pretends to lose her shoes;Edmund carries her home.It is only the next time they meet that he recalls that she has told him to call her 'Maria'.

For Edmund specifically,but also for the other characters,the death of Elsa is a moral catalyst.Suddenly aware of the effect of their fantasies they see each other for the first time,and let go.David goes back to Russia to suffer in his own place;Otto 'broken and made simple by a knowledge of mortality' (p 196) neither fights him nor tries to hold on to Isabel;she feels 'real' and therefore visible to Edmund;and Edmund himself is finally able to see the person who has hitherto been almost invisible as an independent person rather than as a composite mother-figure.

Throughout the novel Maggie,the Italian girl, is a shadowy figure, always felt behind the action,used and accepted by the characters but never allowed any individuality.For Edmund and Otto she merges with the long series of girls employed by Lydia to look after them and then to look after the house.Edmund's relationship with Maggie is very much the kind that is characterised by Sartre in L'Etre et L'Néant where other people are merely objects in an individual's world to be dominated or used at will.[5] But at the novel's end Edmund comes to see Maggie as a separate being.But even as that,she remains opaque,impossible to sum up or fathom. As Isabel is describing Maggie as Lydia's 'personal property',Edmund sees 'with a fresh sharpness' that Maggie is

> a separate and private and unpredictable being.I endowed her, as it were,with those human rights,the right of secrecy,the right of surprise.(p 165)

One recalls Palmer Anderson's shock when he says that Martin has surprised him and Antonia.[6] But here Edmund's realization is a positive ,giving him the chance to drive with her to Rome,the eternal city.

Edmund's realization of Maria is paralleled by Isabel's vision of the cat outside her window,which recalls the ending of Under the Net.And the sense that the true perception of the external world is something in the nature of a spiritual experience is hinted at by the final chapter title, 'Rome',and by Isabel's reference to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in which prayer is equated with love of the world in all its diversity.[7]

Edmund's final break through the clouds of introspection to see the Italian girl clearly is in the mainstream of Iris Murdoch's novelistic practice.Similarly,the disparagement of psychanalysis is not unusual in her work.Indeed,there is nothing particularly new or surprising about The Italian Girl;its only notable features tend to be negative ones.It is very short:the characters tend to be poorly developed:the plot is bizarre; and so on.But the novel is not really that bad;in less distinguished company it might look quite an interesting short novel.

NOTES

1.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 64.She said here that "more philosophy seems to be getting into the novels.The reason,I think, is that I have now got a philosophical viewpoint,a more organized position than I had earlier".She then went on to identify this position with that expressed in her Leslie Stephen Lecture (in other words,the essay 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts').

2.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 70.

3.Iris Murdoch,The Italian Girl,(London,1964).

4.'House of Fiction' pp 64-65.Also see above pp 67-69,77-78.

5.Being and Nothingness p 364.Cited above p 92,and quoted at note 9,p 99.

6.A Severed Head p 97.See above pp 84-85.

7.See S.T.Coleridge,'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner',The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford,1912),p 198. Isabel quotes lines 282-283:

'O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare'.

CHAPTER NINE: THE RED AND THE GREEN

The Red and the Green (1965) is unique among Iris Murdoch's work in that it takes a specifiable historical situation as the basis for its plot. However, it cannot really be called a historical novel despite this, for it too, as Malcolm Bradbury remarked of Under the Net, stakes very little on its historical accuracy.[1] What the situation in Easter Week 1916 offers Iris Murdoch is the opportunity to write about a series of contingent events that are part of some external pattern. This is the situation which has been commented on, generally adversely, by her critics; that she sets a high value on contingency, and then imposes a pattern on her books.[2] In The Red and the Green, of course, the pattern is imposed from the outside. And the pattern of history, which is felt by the characters themselves, is brought into being by the search for freedom as a political concept not by seeking it in a moral sense. Indeed, none of those involved in the Rising regard themselves as free. But they do not manage to be good either.

Another aspect of the historical situation which provides an opportunity to Iris Murdoch is that in a Catholic Ireland there is a ready acceptance of a spiritual dimension to reality. The characters are willing to see their experiences in relation to something which transcends the material world, though for some of them this is Ireland rather than God. But that in itself is of interest in the opposition of the two concepts of freedom. The point is well made by the description of Pat Dumay:

> Of the regions above him he did not very well know how to think. The pure perfection which he somehow knew about and from which he derived his steel-hard absolutes, his sense of justice, his love of Ireland, remained itself veiled and beyond experience. He did not call it God . . . What served Pat, perhaps exclusively, as spiritual experience was the slipping apart of his will from the rest of his being.[3]

Pat's dedication to the domination of the will is a measure of how far he is willing to renounce moral contact with others and to place himself

entirely at the service of a political ideal.It is no surprise that Pat is not interested in women,whom he sees as 'somehow muddled and unclean, representative of the frailty and incompleteness of human life',(p 91) for women in the novel manifest love,albeit a very imperfect and incomplete love.And Pat rightly sees that love will undermine absolute dedication to the political ideal.This point was noted by an early reviewer of the novel.David Galloway suggested that The Red and the Green

> is fatally sabotaged by the melodrama and the sexual imbroglios which would seem to have become the hallmarks of Miss Murdoch's novels.[4]

But he significantly failed to ask why this might be the case,and also to point out that the melodrama,as he calls it,is almost entirely connected with the sexual imbroglios.It is an aspect of the 'muddle' which Pat dislikes,and which Christopher Bellman,himself a scholar with a strongly developed sense of the heroic,also discovers as a result of his desire to marry Millie Kinnard:

> Christopher hated muddle,hated the plunging to and fro in confusion of half-guilty half-frantic human beings caught up together like carriage horses in an accident.(p 294)

But this muddle is part of the contingency of personal lives,it is a factor which is the result of the involvement of people in the patterns of history.And yet Pat turns to history to save himself from the muddle of human affairs,as the only authorial intrusion in the novel reminds us:

> To most of us at most times past history seems like a brightly lit and faintly clamorous procession,while the present is a dark rumbling corridor off which,in hidden shafts and private rooms, our personal stories are enacted.Elsewhere in that obscure continuum,and out of quite other stuff,history is manufactured. Rarely are we able to be the intelligent spectators of an historical event,more rarely still its actors.At such times the darkness lightens and the space contracts until we apprehend the rhythm of our daily actions as the rhythm of a much larger

> scheme which has included us within its composition.Pat felt for the first time this nearness of history,this almost physical sense of a connection with it,when he learnt that on the previous day at a secret meeting Patrick Pearse had been appointed President of the Irish Republic.(p 171)

The Red and the Green re-introduces the multiple plotting found in The Flight from the Enchanter but makes far more of the contingent relationship between the plots.The overlapping plans of individuals,the way in which their hopes and actions converge at particular moments in the same circumstances but working in opposing directions is a well presented image of the independence of people from each other while stressing the necessity of individuals giving their attention to others.[5]It is difficult, such is the interest of all the plots,to isolate a central character in The Red and the Green,and this difficulty is heightened by the family relationships which both bind and divide the characters.However,one major relationship which is of importance throughout the novel is that between Pat Dumay and his step-father,Barnabus Drumm.

Barney's concern is with the spiritual dimension of Ireland rather than the political.He is Anglo-Irish in fact,but has lost his heart to the mystic beauty of Ireland which he sees as residing in the Catholic church.But Barney's pursuit of a spiritual ideal is marred by his inability to lose himself.His past history is of progressive failure in spirituality: failed priest,failed chronicler of the Irish saints,failed Catholic husband. All that he can achieve is the composition of his Memoir,a task which he finds curiously consoling.

Just as Pat is prevented from recognising the moral claims of other individuals by his concern with history,so Barney is prevented by the increasing absorption of his self-analysis:

> His self-abasement provided a not wholly disagreeable emotional occupation;and not only was there no large change,there was not even the smallest,most momentary change in the pattern of life he deplored.He was inside,indeed he was,the machine.(p 113)

This is a familiar ethical issue in Iris Murdoch's work. But the parallel between Barney and Pat suggests that the mechanical can be both internal and external. For Barney it is self-absorption that prevents him from reforming his life and developing moral awareness: for Pat it is the force of history that acts mechanically, as it does upon the other Volunteers:

> (There) were compelling reasons for fighting. But they were haunted by another reason which nobody mentioned. History now required of them that they should shed their blood. They had planned and schemed and hoped for so long, and set going a train of events which seemed to have a momentum of its own. (p 270)

All that is available to halt the machinery of both self and history is the muddle of contingency. And at Millie Kinnard's house at Rathblane that almost happens as all the male members of the cast converge, each for their own private reasons, but all attracted by the ambiguous figure of Millie.

Her boudoir is both shooting gallery and "ecclesiastical"; armed, she cuts a pretty figure; Pat sees her not so much as a woman as a kind of degraded boy. And the responses which she arouses in the four main male characters cover a considerable range, from Pat's fascinated disgust to Christopher's excitement and desire. They converge on Rathblane that night because the patterns which have given shape to their lives up until that point have collapsed. Andrew finds himself in Millie's bed because his engagement to Frances has been broken off by her. Pat goes to Millie needing 'violence and pain, not muddle' (p 243) when he learns that the rising has been cancelled. Christopher finds it necessary to see Millie because she has broken off with Andrew, and this has consequences for his own plans to marry her. Barney comes because his project to reform has foundered once more on his desire to see Millie. What they find, and to some extent cause, is a 'muddle', a tangle of human emotions which it is beyond them to sort out. They are confronted by the dense contingency of human life, and the problem is averted for them by the sudden resurgence of the machinery of history. The cancelled rising is reorganised, and the problems of contingent humanity can be forgotten for the moment.

The ambiguity of Millie is crucial here,for the novel does not simply offer a choice between the values of love or politics.Rather,it offers a choice between the simplicity of some mechanical response which absolves the individual from the need to tackle each situation as unique,and responding to the complexity of the human beings involved in a situation.Barney,as is appropriate for the main spiritual spokesman in the novel,provides us with images for this.He fears the sea and the rocks of the foreshore of Dublin bay:

> He feared the deep crevasses down which a man might slide into some awful sea cavern.More perhaps he feared the huge weight,the appalling hardness,the senselessness of them.They were like the great weighty stupid world which had rolled off the lap of God.(p 122)

The landscape here foreshadows the powerful contingency,the destruction of the self,that is associated with Minn's Cauldron in <u>The Sea,The Sea</u>,[6] and Barney's fear of it is clearly an image of his inability to lose his concern with self.

However,like Effingham Cooper in <u>The Unicorn</u>,[7] Barney does experience a state of mind which gives him access to the good.He is drunk,and wakes up in church,where he has fallen asleep:

> He stared at the sanctuary light and felt the certain almost bodily presence of perfect Goodness.And with this he felt,as he had not felt it before,an absolute certainty of his own existence.He existed and God,opposite to him,existed too.And if he was not,by that juxtaposition,simply dissolved into nothing, it could only be because God was love.(pp 199-200)

But the love of God cannot be realized,at least in any positive or tangible way,for anyone in the novel.The drive for Irish freedom has become a kind of warped spirituality which diverts the attention of many of the characters of the novel.The love of Ireland is also a kind of warped sexuality,suggested by the images of Ireland as a female figure. It is as if individuals themselves are insufficient to arouse passion because of the pressure of larger events.Millie,for instance,has been

attracted by Barney because he was a priest;she also seems to be attracted to Pat because of his military involvement.Even Barney's love for his step-sons cannot be expressed other than by him joining the rebellion. By adopting a role in history Pat has somehow excluded himself from human contact.He makes himself unavailable for Frances's love because of his political involvement.Indeed,it is not untilthe last page of the novel that we realise that Frances has loved Pat at all.

On first reading it is almost possible to overlook Frances as a character of any importance.She is Andrew Chase-White's intended,and she turns him down for reasons which do not seem very clear at the time to either him or the reader.She seems to be generally rather nice,taking an interest in Barney,but does not seem to do anything very much.It is only with the Epilogue that Frances's position needs radical review.She is speaking to her family at breakfast time some time in the 1930s,with the Spanish Civil War rumbling in the background.Her son asks which of the characters of her family who were involved in Easter Week she was in love with.She replies,'"Oh,I was in love with Pat Dumay,"' which is not the answer that is expected.

Here,the reader is suddenly asked to give the story his attention again,to look with new information and to judge more accurately.The Epilogue demands that the reader make the same kind of moral progress that the characters in the novels have to make.Frances's love has been forced out of the possibility of achievement by the machinery of history,and Pat's involvement with it.But it is not therefore worthless,but a further example of the love which exists for nothing,not to gain anything or to further personal ends but simply as love.Frances's love for Pat is a more extreme example of the love than Ann Peronett keeps for her husband Randall. It also demands that we see the people involved in the historical process as people rather than as myths or heroes.To her son's remark that they were a "heroic lot",she replies,'"They were inconceivably brave men,"' which provides a reversal to the Yeatsian mythologising that has run through the novel.(p 318)

Looking again at Frances leads us to recall other occasions when she shows love.She is,as Barney notes,'the only person who had always simply loved him'(p 114),and in a world where the political slogan and the national tradition are frequently invoked,she has looked and seen what is there. At the beginning of the novel she displays a good deal of intelligent awareness,although she is not taken seriously by Andrew's mother,but it is awareness firmly based on what she has seen.In reply to her father's comment that Ireland's past is the English ascendancy,she replies,

> "All that can't be quite right," said Frances."I mean,you seem to be talking as if Ireland were just the grand people.You remember what Grattan said about we are not the people of Ireland.It's everyone having always been so poor that's awful.Compare the Irish countryside with the English countryside.There are no real towns and villages in Ireland.There are the same little featureless houses or hovels everywhere,and then nothing else till you come to your country mansions and the cathedrals of Christ the King." (p 42)

But she is not listened too.Frances is right when she says (p 36) that as a woman one is told that you are important and nice 'but you take second place all the same',and it is revealing that she should say that 'being a woman is like being Irish' at the same time.For,ironically,it is the Irish question that leads to Frances being ignored not just as a woman,but as a moral voice.Like Maggie,the Italian girl,Frances loves selflessly to such an extent that she is in danger of being forgotten. But such love,though pushed aside by the machinery of self and the machinery of history,is the one lasting value of the novel,as the Epilogue makes clear.

NOTES

1. Possibilities p 232. See also p 52 above. Bradbury discusses both The Red and the Green and Under the Net in this chapter.

2. See Degrees of Freedom p 183; Linda Kuehl, 'Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist', Modern Fiction Studies, 15, (Autumn 1969), 347-360 (p 359); The Situation of the Novel p 48, cited above p 1.

3. Iris Murdoch, The Red and the Green, (London, 1965), p 92.

4. David Galloway, 'The Iris Problem', Spectator 22 October 1965, 520.

5. Lorna Sage, 'Female Fictions' in The Contemporary English Novel, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, Stratford on Avon Studies 18, (London, 1979), 67-87 (p 72):

'If the plots seemed once to expend their energies in feats of permutation (A Severed Head) now they burgeon into sub- and parallel structures rather like the multiplying narratives of late Dickens in Our Mutual Friend. The turning point may have been The Red and the Green, her only historical novel, set in Ireland in 1916, which though it competes utterly unsuccessfully with Yeatsian mythology does seem to have signalled a surge of vital curiosity about the sheer differentness of people's lives, and their secure location in time and place.'

Of course, Mrs Sage is wrong in suggesting that The Red and the Green is the first of the novels to use multiple plotting. The Flight from the Enchanter and An Unofficial Rose clearly do as well. Another point is the description of The Red and the Green as a 'historical' novel. Despite the setting, the detail of the historical period is not of prime importance to the novel.

6. The Sea, The Sea pp 365-366.

7. See The Unicorn pp 197-198. See also pp 107-108 below.

CHAPTER TEN:THE TIME OF THE ANGELS

In Iris Murdoch's novels up until The Red and the Green there is a developing interest in 'the good',and a consequent development of her hostility to a kind of modified and popularised existentialism.But despite this general movement,accompanying a growing awareness of the limitations of the 'existential' image of the world,there has been a certain lingering affection for the figure of the existentialist hero.However,the idea that 'these people are appealing'[1],which continued to have some validity throughout the novels of the 1950s,has certainly changed by 1964 when she announced that she found the existentialist image of man 'both alien and implausible'.[2]

This philosophical change is reflected in the novels,for,if Jake Donoghue is the paradigm of the appealing existentialist figure,then Carel Fisher,the existentialist figure of The Time of the Angels (1966),is,in terms of his ethical viewpoint,both alien and implausible within the novel. He shows to an even greater degree the determination to live by his will and,if necessary,in a solipsistic fashion,which are shown by Pat Dumay in The Red and the Green.

The novel tackles head on the consequences for ethical thought and behaviour of the death of God and the consequent collapse of existing mo moral structures.It is Iris Murdoch's first attempt to present the transcendent nature of the moral world and at the same time the fundamental vacuum of the existentialist alternative..The novel develops a number of different images of this alternative in the figures of Muriel,Leo Peshkov and Carel himself. Of these,the two most important in intellectual terms are the two latter figures,for Muriel,as she claims herself,a 'theoretical immoralist',does not behave with a sufficient lack of regard for others to become more than a theoretician.

Neither Leo nor Carel are simply two-dimensional mouthpieces for a particular set of ideas,however.In their different ways they are both satisfactory figures in the novel,having a sufficient degree of opacity and secrecy to make them convincing as characters.They are parallel figures

in fundamental ethical positions,although the manifestations of their ethical viewpoint take radically different forms.Leo,young,selfish and thoroughly secular,in many ways typically adolescent in his partially understood concepts and the forms of his behaviour,is a semi-comic figure.His belief in the absence of any objective moral standards enables him to act without consideration of the feelings of his Russian émigré father whose icon he steals.His statement of his view of life is crass, a joke reflection of the more tortured view of Carel Fisher.Leo sees himself as

> "one of the problems of the age.I'm a lone wolf,a bit like what's-his-name,that chap in Dostoyevsky.I want to train myself in immorality,really get these old conventions out of my system, so whenever I have the chance to tell a lie I do so.Values are only relative anyway.There are no absolute values.And life's so short.And there's the Bomb.And any day you may wake up to find yourself getting lumpy and hey presto it's cancer."[3]

This is hardly the statement of a value system,for it lacks any kind of justification beyond the self.The world simply does not exist for Leo beyond the point that it and the people in it can be manipulated for his own ends.Even those ends lack any clear distinction.Leo is essentially a sorry figure because he has no referents beyond himself,and no real sense of self because he has denied his place in the world.Because he has contracted the world to himself,he becomes essentially marginal for anyone else,having the status of a minor irritant rather than any major force.

On the other hand,Carel is very far from being marginal;he is at the centre of all the lives which converge on his Rectory.What distinguishes Carel from Leo is that he has awareness of the implications of what he is saying.He also knows that there is a greater world than the world of the self,but that world as he sees it is terrifying rather than exalting.

Carel is the existentialist hero carried to the logical extreme and entirely stripped of any personal qualities that might make him attractive.

His presence in the novel is demonic,almost in itself an absence which reflects the absent God.of course,this is made much easier by the fact that Iris Murdoch has made Carel a priest,but the cumulative effect of Carel's appearances in the novel is to suggest a dark,wayward,yet highly articulate and intelligent figure whose influence is enormous yet hardly understood.Those that have to struggle to live with him are urged into line by the paper aeroplanes which he flies down the stairs;by the murmurous sound of the gramophone;by the darkness which he imposes on his room.All these suggest that his power is somehow connected with his lack of availability;that it is because he will not see anyone and shuts himself away from human contact that he gains in power.Carel,if anybody in Iris Murdoch's work,is a man in the grip of a theory[4].That theory is at the centre of Heidegger's Sein und Zeit (Being and Time) according to Antony Flew,and claims that 'death is a way to be' which produces the totality of being:

> The authentic self is potentiality for action,characterised by its orientation towards the future,entailing possibilities and the constant necessity of choice.Every choice is understood as the exclusion of the alternative,through which the nothingness aspect of existence is expressed.The past is significant in terms of unrealised possibilities that relate to the present and future; from these unrealised possibilities stem guilt and anxiety, 'recognising the nothingness in present and future choices and the finiteness of the time alloted.[5]

Carel's suicide is an attempt to make himself complete,to become the full and separated free individual,unrelated to the world outside him.Pattie, who trips over a copy of Sein und Zeit at the beginning of the novel,is right to find its ideas 'senseless and awful,like the boom of some big catastrophe'(p 163) when she finds a copy open on Carel's desk while she is cleaning his room,for this is not what Iris Murdoch believes the world to be.It is,however, the logical end of existentialism.

Carel's ethics create the world he lives in,and which the inhabitants

of his Rectory must also live in;a dark house in a deracinated landscape. The fog which surrounds the house is an image of his ethical position, it prevents communication with the outside world and leaves only its own enclosed area for contemplation.As Pattie sees it:

> Ever since their arrival the fog had enclosed them,and she still had very little conception of the exterior of the Rectory.It seemed rather to have no exterior and,like the unimaginable circular universes which she had read about in the Sunday newspapers, to have absorbed all other space into its substance.(p 23)

Pattie can only escape this enclosed world with Carel's death,when she is able to leave for the moral possibilities of the world and the life of a missionary in Africa.

Carel's world is a machine,constructed to serve his every whim.But it is a machine that nearly destroys his family as it certainly destroys himself.He does not allow his daughter,Elizabeth,outside the Rectory, and is felt to be obscurely responsible for the injury which is supposed to keep her trapped there.His incestuous relationship with her is a reflection of his self-absorption,and is fundamentally destructive.It is Muriel's accidental discovery of this relationship which leads to Carel's suicide and the breaking up of the household.As Zoreh Sullivan sees it,in

> Carel Fisher we understand Murdoch's perception of the demonic as the inevitable result of conceptual and imaginative inadequacy in an age that venerates power and solipsism.[6]

The consequence of Carel's solipsism is indeed the exercise of power, which is a major factor in all the relationships which he has in the novel, with Pattie,with Elizabeth and with her half-sister Muriel.In essence his power is the denial of love;it is the belief that only through the assertion of his will can any sense be made of the universe.The variety and mysteriousness which Iris Murdoch sees as characterising the world are removed by the exercise of power,and the moral world is darkened.Marcus Fisher,responding to the need to see his brother and entering the Rectory during a power cut (itself a nice ironic pointer to a power beyond the

individual which can be cut off by the exercise of individual power),takes hold of a carrot which Carel holds out to him in the darkness instead of his hand.Carel's power denies even this possibility of human contact,for power is all that he sees.He tells Marcus:

> "Any interpretation of the world is childish.Why is this not obvious? All philosophy is the prattling of a child.The Jews understood this a little.Theirs is the only religion with any real grimness in it. The author of the Book of Job understood it.Job asks for sense and justice.Jehovah replies that there is none.There is only power and the marvel of power,there is only chance and the terror of chance.And if there is only this there is no God,and the single Good of the philosophers is an illusion and a fake.(pp 184 -185)

On an individual level there is nothing then but a power relationship, as is indicated by Sartre.[7]Marcus only exists for Carel when Carel strikes him.

As in earlier novels characters cannot escape from the enchantment of such as Mischa Fox,or must struggle to release themselves from the patterns imposed by magicaians like Palmer Anderson,so the inhabitants of the Rectory are held in bondage by the exercise of Carel's power.The situation is made more intractable by the fact that this has a spiritual base,and seems to reflect accurately the vacuum at the moral centre of the universe.Carel does not simply act to prevent others from doing things.He erects a conceptual universe in which they have no means to oppose him.He perverts the spirit of love in Pattie so that she becomes his slave,unable to realize her opportunity to love Eugene Peshkov because of this.When Carel asks Pattie if she will be crucified for him she is unable to resist because her capacity to love has become an aspect of Carel's own will.For the inhabitants of the Rectory any spiritual experience is limited and defined by Carel's power.They are only allowed to treat him as their God.

But,despite Rubin Rabinovitz's assertion that there are only two ethical alternatives in the novel,those of Satanism and weak atheistic humanism,[8] there is another possibility.Carel's brother,Marcus,comes to see the

significance of love.And the importance of this is that it actually challenges Carel on an ethical level rather than avoiding the issue as does the humanism which Rabinovitz comments on and which Marcus locates in his friend Norah Shadox-Brown.Marcus finds

> Norah's brisk sensibleness of an old Fabian radical a bit bleak at times.The cleancut rational world for which she had campaigned had not materialized,and she had never come to terms with the more bewildering world that really existed.Marcus,who shared many of her judgements,could not help being a little fascinated by what she had called the twilight of the gods. Could it be that the great curtain of huge and misty shapes would be rolled away at last,and if it were so what would be revealed behind?(p 21)

Marcus is writing a book entitled Morality in a World without God,a book which attempts to show that morality can maintain some sense of an absolute even without the presence of God.What appears of the book in the novel suggests that it is very similar to the substance of The Sovereignty of Good.Marcus's book undergoes progressive change in response to the events of the novel.It moves from being a theoretical statement of the 'role of Beauty as a revelation of the spiritual'(p 78),to acknowledging that perhaps the necessity for love cannot be contained in any theory at all. This change is the result of Marcus's own efforts to see and to love his brother.When he does finally see him he is exhilerated by what Carel says about being 'good for nothing,without sense or reward'(p 186).He responds to Carel's perceptions in a radically different way:

> Did not the removal of God make real goodness possible at last, the goodness that is good,as it were,for nothing? . . .
>
> It was now clear to him that this was the answer.His great book would not be about good,it would be about love.In the case of love the ontological proof would work.Because love was a real human activity.He would save his brother by loving him.Carel would be made to recognize the reality of love.(pp 210-211)

For Carel,the scattering of the spiritual world consequent upon the

death of God is a matter for despair,leading ultimately to suicide.For Marcus,on the other hand,the 'time of the angels' leads to a positive response.[9]He sees that loving individuals outside the self is a moral activity because it responds to something which is real and other-centred. But his realization comes too late to save Carel who has already killed himself.

Marcus's projected book founders twice;once on the realization that it will have to be about love rather than about morality,and the second time when,confronted with Carel's death,he sees that

> It might be that what he wanted to say about love and about humanity was true but simply could not be expressed as a theory.(p 249)

The exercise of love must be an activity,and it must take account of the nature of the human situation where chance plays such a large part,and which is certain only in its mortality.To recognize this is to accept the fragmentation of the existing moral order,but also to find a world outside the dark world of the Rectory.At the moment of Marcus's final depression about his failed relationship with Carel,he meets Anthea Barlow at the now empty Rectory.He has loved her before,and finds the fact of her turning up again odd,but

> how extremely invigorating he found this oddness.There was a kind of silly innocence about it all,a kind of thoroughly cheering innocence.He looked forward to seeing her again.With her the ordinary world seemed to resume its power,the world where human beings make simple claims on one another and where things are small and odd and touching and funny.(pp 248-249)

And the sunshine breaks through the fog that encloses the Rectory.

The Time of the Angels is not the most satisfying of Iris Murdoch's novels,but it is important in the development of her work in that it sets out to deal with the consequences for morality of the collapse of the traditional foundations of morality.It needs,therefore,to establish very firmly a new basis for morality,or a satisfactory reworking of an existing

basis.What for Carel is a matter for despair provides Marcus with a reason for hope and moral progress.By showing the machinery of life at the Rectory to be an aspect of Carel's will,Iris Murdoch stresses the negative effect of theorising.Carel has worked outwards from his central perception and has created a theory from it rather than look at the detail and the individual aspects of human life.To release themselves from theory and from the will is the moral task which is addressed by many of the characters in her later novels.

Another interesting aspect of the novel is Marcus's feeling that his feeling about 'love and humanity was true but simply could not be expressed as a theory'.The correspondence between Marcus's view and his creator's has been noted,and the fact that Iris Murdoch's philosophical views are out of the mainstream of philosophical thought has also been pointed out.[10] The Time of the Angels,like her other novels,is an attempt to show what cannot be expressed in terms of theory.The novel is a form which welcomes contingency,its stuff is things happening,and happening in a way which is not dictated by theory.It provides Iris Murdoch with an alternative way of showing the truth which she perceives.

NOTES

1.'The Existentialist Hero' p523.

2.The Sovereignty of Good p 9.

3.Iris Murdoch,The Time of the Angels (London,1966) p 73.

4.See Under the Net p 48.See above pp47-50.

5.Antony Flew,A Dictionary of Philosophy (London,1979),see under Heidegger.

6.'The Contracting World of Iris Murdoch's Gothic Novels' p 565-566.

7.See Being and Nothingness p 364.See above pp 92,99,116.

8.Iris Murdoch p 39.

9.Marcus's response is developed more fully in The Philosopher's Pupil (1983) in the character of Father Bernard Jacoby,another priest who has ceased to believe in God.In The Time of the Angels (p 185) Carel claims:

' "The death of God has set the angels free.And they are terrible." '

Father Bernard,in conversation with Rozanov,claims:

' "Our problem now,the problem of our age,our interregnum,our interim, our time of the angels -"

"Why angels?"

"Spirit without God." ' (The Philosopher's Pupil(p 187))

He goes on to claim that the spiritual world simply is the material world seen in a different way.See below pp 234-235.

10.See above p 17.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE NICE AND THE GOOD

The Nice and the Good (1968) is the first of Iris Murdoch's novels which is recognisably later work. The intricate double plotting, the curiously detached yet recogniZable social world, and a definite sense of some mystical dimension to reality are the essential hallmarks of this style. That this is connected with her pronouncement that her subject is now love is undeniable.[1] Love is a necessary first step on the road to perfection, a goal that is beyond all but the exceptional, although that does not lessen the value of the quest. That most should be 'nice' rather than 'good' is not surprising.

In a novel which is so aware of the flawed nature of human effort it is appropriate that the continuing image of the good should come from the world of art rather than from that of contingent reality. Bronzino's Allegory in the National Gallery provides an image which is a touchstone for what happens throughout the novel. In connection with this, Dora Greenfield's sense of the otherness and authority of the paintings in the National Gallery should be recalled.[2] But in addition to this aspect of the work of art, its image lies behind the loose allegory of the novel.[3] As Paula Biranne waits for her estranged husband, she contemplates the picture:

> Paula stared at Bronzino's picture. Since Richard had appropriated the picture she had deliberately refrained from making any theoretical study of it, but she remembered vaguely some of the things she had read about it earlier on. The figures at the top of the picture are Time and Truth, who are drawing back a blue veil to reveal the ecstatic kiss which Cupid is giving to his Mother. The wailing figure behind Cupid is Jealousy. Beyond the plump figure of the rose-bearing Pleasure, the sinister enamel-faced girl with the scaly tail represents Deceit. Paula noticed for the first time the strangeness of the girl's hands, and then saw that they were reversed, the right hand on the left arm, the left hand on the right arm. Truth stares. Time moves. But the butterfly kissing goes on,

> the lips just brushing,the long shining bodies juxtaposed with almost awkward tenderness,not quite embracing.How like Richard it all is,she thought,so intellectual,so sensual.[4]

The interpretation of the painting offered here clearly has bearing on the concepts within the novel.[5]The embrace of Cupid and Venus is set against a background of human vices,and set apart from those vices by the ivory quality of their skins - the skins of the vices are much more naturalistically painted -but the meaning remains obscure.The painting suggests that love is something divine,perhaps beyond the reach of the more human,flawed, figures in the rest of the painting.And yet the divine figures are clearly and recognisably human.Love is essentially mysterious,but what it is is beyond explanation.It is seen as an activity (kissing) rather than as some abstraction,but an activity which is both sensual and intellectual,as Paula rightly notes.

When Iris Murdoch remarked that to write about love seemed rather grandiose,[6]she clearly has some such concept of love in mind.For her,love is to be distinguished from being 'in love',at least in part.To be 'in love' may involve the greatest illusion;it may be an egoistic fantasy far different from the just and understanding selflessness which Iris Murdoch means by love.

In The Nice and the Good love is inextricably linked with the ability to accept the past.All the major figures of the novel are in thrall to their pasts,unable to let what has happened simply exist,but seeing themselves as guilty for events which are purely matters of chance.Mary Clothier,whose husband was killed by a car outside their house,feels responsible for his death because he left the house after a trivial argument.She returns to the scene:

> the old thoughts came crowding to her.If only I had called him back,or tapped on the window,or said just one more sentence to him,or gone with him,as I might have done if we hadn't been quarelling.Anything,anything might have broken that long long chain of causes that had brought him and the motor car together

The enslavement by the past of characters like Mary is suggested by the life they lead in the never-never land of Trescombe under the protection of Kate and Octavian Gray.The world of Trescombe is a world without responsibility,cocooned in perpetual summertime,where the order of the day is perpetual pleasure.Unpleasant things are banished from Trescombe,with the result that no moral progress is made by those who are within its circle. Kate and Octavian's untroubled hedonism is made possible by their material security;and it seems a far cry from them to the suicide Radeechy,but the ethics of Trescombe are no different from those contained in the scrawl on the walls of the vault underneath the Whitehall offices,'Do what thou wilt shall be **the whole of the law.'** (p 215)

What makes the world of Kate and Octavian look so much more attractive than the world of the McGrath/Radeechy plot is their power.But as the novel progresses their attraction fades and the warm glow of the Dorset summer is invaded by insidious half-truths - it is Kate who makes a pass at Fivey, for instance,not the other way round as she tells Octavian - until the final,almost casual revelation that the whole thing is based on a lie and that Octavian has been conducting an affair with his secretary.The appearance of honesty and openness is removed to reveal the same self-seeking that governs the actions of McGrath.In all cases Time works to show the truth,although the only people who can benefit from this are those who have the moral courage to let go of the self.

The parallels between what happens to the people at Trescombe and what happens in the investigation.carried out by Ducane at the office seem merely contingent in that some of the characters inhabit both worlds. But there is a conceptual connection.In both areas John Ducane is called upon to be a judge.Willy Kost,at Trescombe,tells him '"You are our picture of the just man"'(p 183),and he is appointed to investigate the Radeechy suicide for the same reason.He has been a barrister and is an expert on Roman law.He is tempted by this image of himself,and has known

> that there were moments when he had said to himself,"I alone of all these people am good enough,am humble enough,to be a judge".

> Ducane was capable of picturing himself as not only aspiring to be,but actually being,the just man and the just judge.He did not rightly know what to do with these visions.Sometimes he took them, now that he had removed himself from the possibility of actually becoming a real judge,for a sort of harmless idealism.Sometimes they seemed to him the most corrupting influences in his life. (pp 74-75)

It is Ducane's strength that he can recognise the power of his own ego even when he thinks that he may have the qualities of humility and goodness needed to be a judge.He is a good man in conventional terms,but in terms of the high demands of Iris Murdoch's conception of the good,he is haunted by his desire for power even though he tries to rid himself of it.He finds,as his investigation proceeds,that he is enjoying his power over both Biranne and McGrath.He knows that he is trying to get rid of Jessica,his lover,so that he can free himself to pursue a flirtation with Kate.It is Ducane's awareness of his own ego which is unusual in the novel,not the fact that he is driven by it,and it is this awareness which leads him finally to renounce all idea of judging,recognising it as an aspect of power and of the self.

In The Nice and the Good the power of the self is not merely an aspect of various individuals,but an aspect of the whole moral world. In a way which has not occured in previous novels,the self becomes an aspect of the spiritual struggle.Speculating on Radeechy's activities in the vaults of Whitehall,Ducane puts it to himself like this:

> It's the dreariness of it,thought Ducane,that stupefies.This evil is dreary,it's something shut in and small,dust falling upon cobwebs, a bloodstain upon a garment,a heap of dead birds in a packing case. Whatever it was that Radeechy had so assiduously courted and attracted to himself,and which had breathed upon him,squirted over him,that odour of decay,had no intensity or grandeur.These were but small powers,graceless and bedraggled.Yet could not evil damn a man,was there not blackness enough to kill a human soul?

> It is in me, thought Ducane, as he continued to look through the empty blue staring eyes of McGrath.The evil is in me.There are demons and powers outside us,Radeechy played with them,but they are are pygmy things.The great evil,the real evil,is inside myself. It is I who am Lucifer.With this there came a rush of darkness within him which was like fresh air.(p 214)

In identifying the power of the self with Lucifer,Iris Murdoch is linking the power of the ego with the archetypal sin.What is important about this passage and much of the novel,however,is that it re-expresses conventional Christian ideas in a secular framework.So the self is what drags man away from the good.Radeechy's dabblings in black magic,his search for magical power,is seen as irrelevant.The real spiritual task is to deal with the self.

Ducane's discovery of Radeechy's black masses and slaughtered pigeons comes about as a result of his investigation,and that investigation uncovers more,particularly about the moral world,than merely the circumstances of Radeechy's suicide.Radeechy's activities throw light upon the darker side of the moral life,but there are other aspects of it which the investigation and the characters at Trescombe bring to the surface.Whereas Radeechy has made the world seem small,by limiting it through the self,the twins at Trescombe expand their world beyond the normal.For them,everything is of beauty and interest and has significance simply because it is there. Their reports of flying saucers are met with gentle scepticism but the final scene of the novel insists that the saucers are there:

> It was difficult to discern the size of the saucer,which seemed to inhabit a space of its own,as if it were inserted or pocketed in a dimension to which it did not quite belong.In some way it defeated the attempt of the human eye to estimate and measure. It hovered in its own element,in its own silence,indubitably physical,indubitably present and yet other.(p350)

The point here is that,for the twins,the world grows larger,in a sense, because of their openness.To be good means to be open to experience

beyond the self.The twins,in their innocence,possess that quality;their acquaintance with the flying saucer is a symbol of the way that denying the self broadens the moral world.[7]

But the dark enclosed world of the self inhabited by Radeechy is also to be found at Trescombe.Pierce Clothier,Mary's son,ignored by Barbara Gray, with whom he is in love,swims into Gunnar's Cave and is trapped by the rising tide.John Ducane swims in after him,and faces,as Effingham Cooper did in The Unicorn,the prospect of death.[8]Ducane waits for the rising tide with Pierce:

> I wonder if this is the end,thought Ducane,and if so what it will all have amounted to.How tawdry and small it has all been.He saw himself now as a little rat,a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts.To live easily,to have cosy familiar pleasures,to be well thought of. . . . He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge.Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat,not to judge,not to be superior,not to exercise power,not to seek,seek,seek.To love and to reconcile and to forgive,only this matters.All power is sin and all law is frailty.Love is the only justice.Forgiveness, reconciliation,not law.(pp 304-305)

The real difference between Ducane's experience and Effingham Cooper's is that Ducane carries it with him back to the world.His is not forgotten, he attempts to put into practice what he learns in the cave,although part of his effort is still flawed by power.He uses what he has learnt in his investigation to force (there is no other word) Biranne to try to be reconciled with his wife,Paula (Chapter Thirty-seven).In return,Ducane keeps quiet about Biranne's involvement with Radeechy's wife.But his desire to effect reconciliation is sincere,even if the means by which he brings it about suggest the impossibility of leaving power and the ego behind.

For,as Ducane comes to see,the desires of the self lie behind all evil,even Pierce's attempt to force Barbara to see him is a product

of the self,an effort at magic,like Radeechy's efforts to force the world to run to his pattern.Ducane,having used the magic of his position to make Biranne meet Paula,resigns his post,leaving a report which deals only with the security aspects of Radeechy's death.He at least attempts to break free from the machinery of the self.

Ducane's views are echoed by Willy Kost,the veteran of Dachau.Indeed, Willy knows what Ducane had yet to learn,and tells him early in the novel that "We are the most mechanical thing of all.That is why we can be forgiven".(p 51)Later,he tells Jessica,Ducane's lover,that

> "jealousy is a dreadful thing,Jessica.It is the most natural to us of the really wicked passions and it goes deep and envenoms the soul. . . . Human frailty forms a system,Jessica,and faults in the past have their endlessly spreading network of results.We are not good people,Jessica,and we shall always be involved in that great network,you and I.All we can do is constantly to notice when we begin to act badly,to check ourselves,to go back,to coax our weakness and inspire our strength,to call upon the names of virtues of which we know perhaps only the names.We are not good people,and the best we can hope for is to be gentle,to forgive each other and to forgive the past,to be forgiven ourselves and to accept this forgiveness,and to return again to the beautiful unexpected strangeness of the world."(p 191)

It is 'the unexpected strangeness of the world' which is celebrated in the complexities of the plot of The Nice and the Good.Even the evil of the McGrath plot of the novel is presented in its contingent surprisingness. It is this aspect of it which provokes Ducane to examine it and to discover its moral qualities.And as Willy Kost points out,human beings are imperfect creatures,but even those imperfections can be used to make moral progress. Willy's knowledge of,and acceptance of,the limitations of ordinary mortals is in contrast with the inability of Theo,Octavian's brother and a failed Buddhist monk,to accept imperfect human love.He cannot forgive the past, as Willy says must be done,because he has failed to achieve the good.

> Theo had begun to glimpse the distance which separates the nice from the good,and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul.He had seen,far off,what is perhaps the most dreadful thing in the world, the other face of love,its blank face.Everything that he was,even the best that he was,was connected with possessive self-filling human love.That blank demand had implied the death of his whole being.(p 348)[9]

Theo has been unwilling to make that sacrifice,but he has returned to Trescombe as a malcontent,unable to let go of his self but also perpetually dissatisfied with this failure.It is because he is unable to accept the imperfections of people,himself included,and is unable to forgive that Theo remains a marginal figure in the novel.Will Kost's viewpoint,the man who has experienced the worst that man can do to man in Dachau and yet can forgive, is felt to be a more valuable one;the good is a distant goal,not a reason for despair and individuals should pursue the task by working with the available material.They should try,as both John Ducane and Willy realize, to destroy selfishness and jealousy and to cultivate those significant 'secondary'[10] moral qualities forgiveness and reconciliation.

NOTES

1.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 68.Cited above p 91 and pp 10,23 above.

2.The Bell pp 191-192.See above pp 76-77.
The recent televised version of The Bell interestingly missed this passage out.As a result of this and other omissions,either because much of the narrative could not be translated into televisual terms or because the director thought it unnecessary to try,the television version reduced The Bell to a rather quirky country house thriller.

3.See Lorna Sage,'The Pursuit of Imperfection',Critical Quarterly, 19, (Summer 1977),61-68 (p 66):
'her basic procedure is a loose form of allegory (or allegorizing,to emphsise that it's a continuous process) and her mythological figures are deliberately attached to particular pieces of canvas,as though she's insisting on their being human creations.'
Robert Scholes,Fabulation and Metafiction,also sees Iris Murdoch as writing 'allegorical fabulation' (p 55).

4.Iris Murdoch,The Nice and the Good (London,1969) p323.The dust jacket of the first edition has a cartoon of Bronzino's 'Allegory' on it.The Sacred and Profane Love Machine also has a version of the painting referred to in its title (Titian's 'Sacred and Profane Love') on its dust jacket,and Henry and Cato and The Sea,The Sea have reproductions of paintings - Max Beckmann's 'Acrobat on Trapeze' and Hokusai's 'The hollow of the deep-sea wave off Kanagawa' respectively -on their dust-jackets.I assume that these jackets were produced with the author's approval and in any event show the felt significance of works of art to these novels.

5.There seems to be some debate about the meaning of the painting.
See Keith Roberts,Italian Renaissance Painting (Oxford,1976) p 14:
'It is an allegory - a genre of which the Renaissance was very fond - but its precise meaning is no longer clear.The central female figure is undoubtedly Venus and the boy who embraces her Cupid.The old man in the background has an hour-glass behind him and must be Father Time.The child on the right with roses could be Folly while the girl behind him with the hindquarters of an animal and the sting in her tail could be Deceit.The figure tearing her hair on the left may well be Jealousy.The general meaning of the picture might be that Time reveals sensual pleasure as leading to jealousy and despair.'
This is a different interpretation from the one offered in the novel. It is worth noting that the figure of Kate as described in The Nice and the Good p 19 recalls the rose-bearing figure that Iris Murdoch identifies as Pleasure.Jealousy and deceit,time and truth are certainly factors, if not actual characters in the novel.

6.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 69.

7.See 'Female Fictions' p 73:
'Her characters,despite the recantations,never seem to achieve the openness their author wants from them - that she has to symbolize by bits of randomness,things and creatures from another dimension:the flying saucers in The Nice and the Good ,a drifting balloon in The Black Prince, the illegitimate,unwanted child Luca in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine . . . '
Lorna Sage is not dismissing these incidents as absurd,but pointing to their value in the scheme of the novels.

8.The Unicorn pp 197-198.See above pp 107-108.

9.See Frank Baldanza,'The Nice and the Good',Modern Fiction Studies,15 (Autumn 1969),417-428.Baldanza sees the 'Nice' as accommodating themselves to moral messes from the past on a human plane of love.The 'Good' he sees as the possibility of a selfless spiritual love.So far,so good; however,he seems to be suggesting that these are categories of people rather than levels of moral attainment.

10.The Sovereignty of Good p 22.See above p 14.

CHAPTER TWELVE: BRUNO'S DREAM

Bruno's Dream (1969) continues to explore the selfless love that is at the heart of The Nice and the Good. Like the previous novel it, too, is much concerned with the past and with death and with the way in which these fundamental factors of life have to be accommodated within a moral vision. The distinction between the novels' methods lies primarily in the more obvious abandonment of any attempt at psychological realism and at the more directly parallel plotting in the later novel.[1] That this is not an accidental development is clear from the very nature of the concepts which govern the development of the work and which are indicated in the vision that Nigel, the mystical half of the Boase twins, has at the start of the work:

> In the beginning was Om, Omphallos, Om Phallos, black undivided round devoid of consciousness or self. Out of the dreamless womb time creeps in the moment which is no beginning at the end which is no end. . . .
>
> Two indistinct and terrible angels encircle the earth, embracing, enlacing, tumbling through circular space, both oned and oneing in magnetic joy. Love and Death, pursuing and pursued.[2]

That Love and Death are the twin angels of the novel, encircling its world and illuminating all that takes place, is signified by the presence of Nigel, both in his interferences in the action and, more importantly, in the fact that he seems to be omni-present. There is nothing he does not know; little that he does not actually see. His twin, the earthy Will, whose Christian name is clearly symbolic, acts in a diametrically opposed way. He sees (understands) little, and is always concerned for the self. His brute strength, though feared to some extent, lacks the power of Nigel's gentleness. It is Will who ensures that the dream will go on, although it will not be Bruno's. It is Nigel who is the agent who assists others to change their perception and break free from the dream. The dream, Bruno's dream, is life itself:

> What had happened to him and what was it all about and did it

> matter now that it was practically over,he wondered.It's all a dream,he thought,one goes through life in a dream,it's all too hard.(p 7)

Life is a dream when dominated by the self.It can only achieve a sight of reality when it forgets the self and loves in such a way that self disappears. Love is Death,and the world continues despite that.Bruno's Dream involves the realization of Effingham Cooper's moment of vision;it is not lost in comic drunkeness,but achieved as a transforming ideal.The sin of the world is at least partially washed away in the flood of the Thames,an allusion to the Biblical flood.But as the flood is limited to the immediate area of Bruno's house the escape from the self does not extend as far as Kensington and Miles,Bruno's son.

Until the transformation of the riverside world by the flood,it is self which dominates the novel - the self that does not love,but which falls in love and attempts to exercise power over the beloved.The comic entanglements of Danby O'dell and Will Boase with Adelaide the Maid,and of Danby and Miles over Lisa and Diana,all comment on the activities of the self.Danby's self-satisfaction and hedonism are merely another aspect of the tortured guilt of Miles and the brute self-assertion of Will;they all place themselves at the centre of the universe.But there is a difference between them which is noted by P.W.Thomson:

> Iris Murdoch's characters,who are to be distinguished less importantly by what they are than by what they recognize.[3]

The recognition of the significance of love is reserved among these three for Danby,although he does not achieve the love which is the same as death despite knowing about it.The machinery of the self,and of the guilt which is born in the past,is transcended only by Bruno among the central male characters.

At the centre of the novel are the three widowers;Bruno,Miles and Danby. They are related;Miles is Bruno's son,Danby his son-in-law.All are haunted by a sense of guilt about their pasts and their late wives.Of these feelings,Bruno's guilt is the most insistent and damaging for he believes

that he has made his wife,Janie,hate him and that she has died cursing him. It is characteristic of the novel that little that happens in its daily course has much significance in a moral sense.The moral action is enacted internally in respect of the characters' remote pasts.They do not have to accommodate themselves to the events of the present,[4] for these are part of the dream.It is the past which is real and haunting in as much as they carry it with them.In The Nice and the Good the consequences of the past were available to the plot in a way in which they are not available to Bruno.He is dying as the novel opens,and his progress must therefore depend entirely upon his coming to see events which cannot be altered in a different way.There is nothing which he can actually do which will achieve anything.In The Nice and the Good,on the other hand,Mary Clothier can marry John Ducane:the Birannes can return to each other;the past can be acted upon as a consequence of a change in vision.In Bruno's Dream moral progress is entirely an internal matter.[5] At his death,Bruno sees that Janie had not wanted to curse him,but to forgive him.

> And if there is something that matters now at the end then it must be the only thing that matters.I wish I'd known it then.It looks as if it would be easy to be kind and good since it's obvious now that nothing else matters at all.But of course then was inside the dream. . . .
>
> . . . He had loved only a few people and loved them so badly, so selfishly.He had made a muddle of everything.Was it only in the presence of death that one could see so clearly what love ought to be like? (p 287)

He cannot redeem the past,but he can,at least see the accidentalness of it all and cease to place his own guilt at the centre.As Willy Kost told Jessica in The Nice and the Good,'human frailty is a system'[6] which works against love.It is the product of the 'mechanical' ego.Nigel tells Diana as she contemplates suicide because both her husband,Miles,and Danby,from whom she wants love,are in love with her sister Lisa that she must 'let them walk on you':

> "It is mostly a dream,Diana.Only little pieces are clear and they don't necessarily fit together.When we suffer we think everything is a big machine.But the machine is just a fantasm of our pain."
> (p 227)

And Diana,through her contact with Nigelthe agent of the twin angels of Love and Death,can experience the love that involves the death of the self. Despite the horrifying physical appearance of Bruno she comes to love him at the end.

> The helplessness of the human stuff in the grip of death was something which Diana felt now in her own body.She lived the reality of death and felt herself made nothing by it and denuded of desire.Yet love existed and it was the only thing that existed.[7]
> (p 293)

Such an idea of love is conceptually connected with the chanciness and mortality of the world.Since the world displays no pattern and no controlling agencies other than those of chance and death,[8] love must involve the abandonment of the self in accepting the chanciness of life.If chance is all,then the individual cannot be important.To see,as Diana comes to, that love exists is automatically to lose the self.

It is Nigel who helps Diana to this recognition,and he also helps Danby to the same view,though through far more dramatic means.The duel which he arranges between Will and Danby on the bed of the Thames to decide who will have Adelaide is a splendid comic image of the dream of the self. Its violence,which suddenly surfaces for Danby as he realizes that it is not just a theatrical farce but a real duel,and that the pistols are loaded, and the fact that two men are fighting for the possession of a woman reinforce the absurdity of the selfish ego.Will wins Adelaide because Danby is made to see the insubstantiality of his love for her compared with the love he had,and still has,for his dead wife,Gwen.He escapes the dream of self because he sees the truth about what he has been doing and swims away under Battersea Bridge;

> The still flowing tide took him gently with it.He felt a strange beatific lightness as if all his sins,including the ones which

he had long ago forgotten,had been suddenly forgiven.(p 240)

Danby's swim in the Thames recalls Jake Donoghue's .Both are accompanied by a sense of release from restriction and a sense of a more embracing view of events and individuals.

Danby's regeneration is not as complete as Diana's,an indication of the imperfection of human love.It is a genuine moral move,however,although Danby lacks the awareness for it to be as comprehensive as Diana's change.[10] Throughout the novel Danby is paired with those of greater spiritual resource than he is.Both Diana and her sister Lisa are able to help Bruno come to terms with his death and with himself in a way that no other characters in the novel can do.And Gwen,whom Lisa resembles,was also on a higher moral plane than her husband;Danby reflects that 'Gwen was intense and high and spiritual'.(p 16)

This pairing of the spiritual and the physical reflects the two aspects of the Boase twins,Nigel and Will.It seems that these pairings are meant to suggest the close relationship of the earthy and the spiritual,as if they were aspects of the same thing.This is consistent with Iris Murdoch's ethical views expressed at the same time (1969) in 'On God and Good'.[11](And it is worth noting how often siblings appear in Iris Murdoch's novels in much the same kind of relationship.[12]) She is at pains to point out that she does not believe the perfectible good is other than the material world,but grows out of an apprehension of it.

But the key to the movement towards that infinite goal is to see the world in a particular way,as apart from and more important than the self. Miles Greensleave is a poet who has tried to turn his grief at the loss of his wife,Parvati,into art.He has failed,largely because he cannot accept her death as it is,a horror.He has tried to turn it into a thing of beauty and to make it significant rather than letting it be.His 'Notebook of Particulars',in its third volume,is his attempt to see things accurately, but is actually an effort to tie things down and to make them part of an intelligible patterned universe.Through his brief love for Lisa he almost makes the break through to a clearer vision,but,like Effingham Cooper,is

unable to sustain this:

> There was a barrier to be surmounted which he could not surmount, and the barrier was a moral barrier.Was it still possible somehow to cleave his heart in twain and throw away the worser part of it? Miles knew that such a thing could never be simple,could scarcely be conceivable.A human being is a morass,a swamp,a jungle.It could only come from somewhere beyond,as a dream as a haunting vision, that image of the true love,the love that accepts death,the love that lives with death.(p 180)

But he cannot break free,for,as Diana sees at the end:

> Miles had needed a crisis in his relations with the past,he had needed a certain ordeal,and she had helped him achieve it.Now he had returned into himself more self-sufficient than ever before. (p 291)

That Miles can have this crisis and yet make no moral progress is curiously unaccounted for in the novel.It is almost as if it is necessary that someone should fail,and that Miles seems the best bet rather than that there is any particular reason in the character for such a failure.As Patrick Swinden has noted,the characters in Iris Murdoch's novels are not free but inhabit complex plots which are more interesting than they are:

> And these plots are the principal means whereby the novelist expresses her ideas about freedom,reality,goodness and truth . . . Representation of the irreducible mystery of persons takes second place to a manipulation of concepts which will enable the reader to reacquire an understanding of that mystery,that opacity.[13]

That Bruno's Dream should,to use Iris Murdoch's own pejorative,'give in to the myth'[14]is not a failure in her ability,but an indication of a distinct change in purpose which correponds with the change in philosophical position made clear in her interview with W.K.Rose.[15]The redefinition of familiar concepts that takes place in this novel and in The Nice and the Good almost entails a submerging of character,for we cannot see them until we have the necessary conceptual equipment to do so.And the myth

of Bruno's Dream, the pattern that emerges, is of the domination of the world by the two dark angels of Love and Death. That this kind of writing is mythic is reinforced by the almost casual references to other myths and archetypes. The presence of the Flood has been noted as an allusion, but its presence is not specific but rather general. Similarly, the references to Shiva and Parvati that appear to illuminate the relationship of Miles and his late wife do not do so in any precise way.[16] They tend rather to suggest a mythic framework which the novel partakes of in a general sense. Such allusions serve to suggest not some pattern or key by which the work can be understood, but rather its universal quality. They say, 'Thus it has always been, if one looks hard enough', rather than offering precise parallels for one set of experiences in another. They are an aspect of the way in which we live 'in myth and symbol all the time'[17] and are an important part of her work.

NOTES

1.P.W.Thomson,'Iris Murdoch's Honest Puppetry',Critical Quarterly 11 (Autumn 1969) 277-283,(p 277):
'Bruno's Dream is written with a dramatist's ritualistic convention, to which it adheres throughout.'
Thomson points out that the novel is 'mythic' rather than 'psychological' in the way that it motivates its characters.This is a particularly useful essay in that it attempts to define what Iris Murdoch is doing with character rather than to say what she is not doing and to criticize her for failing to do it.

2.Iris Murdoch Bruno's Dream (London,1969) pp 24-25.

3.'Iris Murdoch's Honest Puppetry',p 281.

4.'Iris Murdoch's Honest Puppetry',p 280:
'The characters do not contemplate the recent event,the false peripety, in order to understand their new circumstances,but the remote past which they have now suddenly recognized and formally accepted in the present.'

5.As,of course,as Iris Murdoch claims it is in her ethical writing.See The Sovereignty of Good p 23.

6.The Nice and the Good p 191.Cited above p 142.

7.See also Baldanza,Iris Murdoch,p 154:
'The purest form of love - Platonic in several sense - entails,as does the moment of death,a peacefully universal benignity that renounces attachments to the past and that bathes one's entire attitude in calm forgiveness and serenity.'

8.See The Sovereignty of Good p 79.

9.Under the Net pp 118-120.See above pp 50-51.

10.Elizabeth Dipple,Work for the Spirit p 174,remarks that
'Danby is a very fully fleshed out character.Not only are serious, intellectual,almost saintly women in this fiction charmed by him;he interests the reader on several levels,most significantly in the blending of his comic dimension into a larger,largely unconscious identification of him as morally valuable. . .
. . .His unworthiness is genuine,but his clear knowledge of it indicates his status as a morally advanced person for whom and in whom the comedy of the world is enacted.'

11.See The Sovereignty of Good p 59.

12.Most notably in the twins Catherine and Nick Fawley in The Bell.But the sibling relationship has a significant part to play in The Sandcastle, A Severed Head,The Italian Girl,The Time of the Angels,An Accidental Man, A Word Child,Henry and Cato and The Philosopher's Pupil.

13.Unofficial Selves p 232.Patrick Swinden seems to regard this as a limitation,but I would see it as a positive feature in the same way that P.W.Thomson (see p 147 above) sees what happens to characters as of more significance than their mental states and dispositions.

14.'The House of Fiction' p 63.

15.'Iris Murdoch,Informally',p 64.Cited above p 112.

16.See William F.Hall 'Technique and Meaning in the novels of Iris Murdoch', Modern Fiction Studies,15,(Autumn 1969) 429-443,(p 439):
He suggests that the goddess Parvati manifests herself in the infinite individual form of women.'
See also Howard German,'Allusions in the Early Novels of Iris Murdoch', Modern Fiction Studies 15 (Autumn 1969) 361-377,and 'The Range of Allusions in the Novels of Iris Murdoch',Journal of Modern Literature 2, (September 1971) 57-85.
German manages to note many allusions,but seems singularly unable to comment on their significance,if any.

17.'Mass,Myth and Might' p 338.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A FAIRLY HONOURABLE DEFEAT

A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970) and the novel which follows it in the canon, An Accidental Man (1971), both use the conceptual position established in the two previous novels in the context of a recognisable social environment. The world of A Fairly Honourable Defeat is that of the senior civil servants and academics which are thought of as typical of Iris Murdoch's work. However, the most substantial achievement of this novel is to take the mystical conception of love developed in the novels discussed so far, and to examine its status in a world where the contingent realities of life are fully apparent.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is very much a novel of theory and practice. Like Marcus Fisher in The Time of the Angels, Rupert Foster has almost finished his great book, a work which appears to have a close resemblance to The Sovereignty of Good. Like his creator, Rupert's theory is that love is the crucial moral concept. But Rupert has failed to take account of his own egoism, and when confronted with a complex moral problem he is unable to resist the blandishments of his own ego. He is so flattered to think that someone else loves him that he cannot act out his theoretical commitment to telling the truth and being honest with his wife. He collapses into the mechanical patterns of the ego, which is why Julius King, who has produced this midsummer enchantment, knows what will take place. The great irony is that it is because of Julius's machinations that Rupert and Morgan each come to believe the other is in love with them. Their egos are so attracted by this, that the situation begins to become true.

But the truth is not always easy to speak. Rupert's brother is also put under a spell by Julius which threatens to destroy his homosexual 'marriage' to Axel. He manages to save the situation because he is forced to speak the truth by the pressure of circumstances, not because he thinks he will be believed, or indeed, that he thinks the truth looks likely. Simon Foster emerges from his enchantment only too well aware that it is luck, not virtue which has saved him. Rupert is not so lucky.

In all this the key position is held by Julius King.Julius makes everybody anxious,a reaction which is an unconscious acknowledgement of his power.He recognises no moral structure whatever,believing that all human beings are as egoistic as he is himself and that love is an illusion used to cover this fact,a dream of selflessness which is mere fantasy.His enchantment of Rupert proves his point at least with regard to Rupert, although it does not completely discredit Rupert's theory.[1]

Julius's power is so effective because he recognises and makes use of qualities which are in other people.His enchantment causes the catastrophe of Rupert's death,in that had Julius not intervened it would not have occured,but is not really responsible for it.It is Rupert himself who bears that responsibility for at all times he could remove the enchantment by simply telling Hilda,his wife,the truth,That he does not do so allows the muddle to develop an inexorable strength making it less possible to break free.Simon does manage this despite seeming a weaker person than his brother.[2]

Rupert's expressed concern for Hilda is actually a concern for his own image in her eyes .Simon's greatest fear is that Axel will think he is a little flirt.Julius arranges a situation in which the selfish concerns of those involved will act for him.His own view of evil suggests that his enjoyment of his activities is total,and his concern for those affected nil:

> "Good is dull . . . Evil,on the contrary,is exciting and fascinating and alive.It is also much more mysterious than good. Good can be seen through.Evil is opaque."[3]

In a world where most characters believe themselves to be altruistic and humane,Julius's cynicism and contempt for others is powerful because it is not fully taken seriously.Only Morgan,his ex-lover,has taken it seriously, but has found that the excitement and power that he seems to offer is false:

> Morgan had seen something in those later days with Julius which had seemed like a deep truth.It had been like a mystical vision

into the heart of reality, as if we were promised the secret of the universe and then, with all the sense of significance and finality fully preserved, to be shown a few mouldering chicken bones lying in a dark corner covered with dust and filth.[4] (pp 131-132)

What Morgan sees here is the nastiness and meaninglessness of the egoist's world. It is in direct contrast to the vision she has of the variety and beauty of the world on the way to Cambridge with Peter. (See p 158 below.)

Julius encourages the mechanical aspects of people, thus preventing them from seeing at all the sheer otherness that surrounds them. For all the characters in the novel, the mechanical response is very near the surface. It provides an unthinking response, an automatic way of dealing with experience. Both Rupert and Hilda are aware of the trap in their relations with their son, Peter. Rupert says to her:

> "When I see Peter I find myself play-acting the stern father. It's not what I feel at all. It's just mechanical."
>
> "I know. We're both of us rather mechanized about Peter, I'm afraid." (p 14)

And yet Rupert and Hilda know, as a matter of theory, that they must just 'go on loving someone helplessly' (p 17). But their theoretical understanding is prevented from attaining practical application by their hedonism; they will not put in the work which Tallis Browne sees as necessary. Tallis can see, of course, that Peter's revolt against his parents is itself a mechanical response. Tallis has hoped that Peter might notice those more unfortunate than himself:

> Here the causes of human misery, though they were infinitely complex, were shadowily visible, and one could see the machine. Tallis had trusted that a glimpse of the machine might make Peter understand something, might make him see that revolt may be itself mechanical, and that human ills need thought and work which are disciplines of the imagination. (p 98).

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is more explicit than earlier novels in linking the 'mechanical' in life to the workings of the ego. The self-satisfied air of Rupert and Hilda, the adolescent revolt of Peter; both

can prevent the development of the active moral self.But the novel also shows two other causes of the 'mechanical' in life.Morgan,returning form the United States and her affair with Julius cannot confront Tallis,her husband,although she is obsessed with him.

> Ever since she had learnt that Tallis knew of her presence and had met Julius she had felt an agonizing almost humiliating need to see her husband (p 102)

She goes to see him and finds the experience terrible.To get through it

> She said to herself,no tenderness,no pity,nothing.I must see him as a puppet.I must go through this like a machine.(p 103)

Morgan here deliberately adopts a machine-like approach so that she can get through without feeling for Tallis.Shattered by Julius and her abortion, she needs to hang on to her sense of self in order to survive.Her unwillingness to move out beyond the limits of her self is a defensive device.However,Morgan's self-protective mechanisation is a conditioned response which is appropriate to the urban,highly peopled environment in which she finds herself.Outside this,on the way back from Cambridge with Peter,she can see more clearly what the moral imperatives are.She experiences what she describes as 'a case of panic' in the overgrown railway cutting,as if the super-abundance of the natural world is too frightening for her,and then,calmimg down,she tells Peter that the world is good.He doubts it,and she asserts:

> "Something is good," she said."Something is.This is." She lifted up a feather-leaved stem covered with tiny vetch flowers. Each flower was purple above and blue beneath and very faintly striped as if the colour had been drawn in by repeated strokes of a very fine pen.
>
> "Oh <u>nature</u>," said Peter."I don't count that.That's just stuff. I mean <u>our</u> things.Find me one of those and I'll be impressed."
>
> "What about," she said,"what about ,what about . . . What about this."

And she recites 'Full Fathom Five' .(p 167)[5]

Morgan,too,is a theorist who cannot put her theories into practice. But in the country,when she recovers from her initial attack of panic, and can allow her fear of losing her self to subside,she can see that the existence of the world of nature and of the world of art are both guarantees of the existence of something unselfish and outside her,and that to respond to them is a moral response.But in the contingent press of London,particularly when under the enchantment of Julius,she loses that awareness and is too concerned to defend her self.On her return to London from Cambridge she is available to become one of the two asses in Julius's midsummer enchantment.

If Morgan's response to the pressure of London life is to seek refuge in the mechanical,Rupert thinks to cope with those same pressures by acting mechanically,but virtuously.Suddenly confronted with the belief that Morgan loves him he ponders his course of action:

> What he had said to Julius once had been true:he had come not so much to despise as simply to ignore the drama of his motives.He sought simply for truthful vision,which in turn imposed right action. The shadow play of motive was a bottonless ambiguity,insidiously interesting but not really very important.Could he do it here, latch himself into the machinery of virtue and decent decision,and simply slide past the warm treacherous area of confusing attachment? For there was no doubt that he was extremely attached to his sister-in-law.(p 226)

The problem here is that Rupert misapplies his theory.Propelled onwards by his ego and his first 'mad elation' he ignores his motives;which in this case are highly significant.Secondly,he takes comfort in the notion that virtue is 'mechanical';which,according to Iris Murdoch,it can be, but only after considerable moral preparation,only after learning to see.[6] Rupert thinks that he can do this,but fails,as Julius knows he will.His ego is too impressed with the thought that Morgan loves him to be able to see clearly.Rupert's intentions are good,his theory is impeccable,but he still behaves with mechanical predictability. Similarly,Morgan's concern

to defend her self is understandable,but still disastrously egocentric. A Fairly Honourable Defeat has a keen sense of the barriers to the achievement of the moral life.

These barriers exist for all the characters in the novel,including Tallis Browne,who comes nearest to being the good man.[7] Tallis's failure is that he cannot tell his father,Leonard,that he has cancer.Tallis's other failures are simply failures of worldliness,which may matter in the eyes of Hilda and Morgan,but do not affect his moral worth.Characteristically, Tallis behaves selflessly.He refuses to use his power over Morgan to make her return to him;he refuses,or is unable,to assert himself over people in general,hence the muddle that dominates his life.And yet,when a moral issue arises,Tallis acts,as he does twice in the novel.Firstly,he hits the youth who is attacking the black man in the Chinese restaurant, acting when no one else does anything decisive.Secondly,he telephones Hilda to explain how Julius has enchanted Rupert.That this action does not prevent the catastrophe is because of other contingencies.Tallis's actions have a directness and simplicity which is completely opposed to Julius's machinations.But above all,Tallis shows what it is to act virtuously. He acts with no thought of self,and with no need for choice.The action is demanded by the situation,by somebody else's need.His is the true 'machinery of virtue'.

Tallis also shows a mature acceptance of the place of chance in human life.He tries to save Rupert from what he fears will happen,but fails.He accepts that without guilt and without false consolation:

> He did not believe that Rupert had taken his own life.But this was little consolation.The accident was deeply the product of its circumstances . . . He grieved blankly over something which seemed,in its disastrous compound of human failure,muddle and sheer chance,so like what it was all like . . .Then he tried just to remember Rupert and keep the memory clear and feel the pain of it mindlessly.(pp 398-399)

Like no other character,Tallis can accept the interference of chance in

human affairs:All that mere mortals can do is to speak the truth about the world and not impose upon other people.The actions enjoined on individuals by Iris Murdoch's grandiose subject are actually rather small.

Or at least,they are small when stated.It is one of Iris Murdoch's strengths as a novelist that she can see the contingent difficulties of adhering to even a simple theory.Many of the novel's characters can see what they ought to do;they cannot actually do it,however.Morgan cannot actually let her self go enough to return to Tallis and accept his love, any more than Rupert can tell Hilda what is happening between him and Morgan.The roots of this inability are to be found in a self regard which Tallis simply lacks.

One further aspect of A Fairly Honourable Defeat that calls for attention is what Richard Todd calls 'The Shakespearian Interest' of the novel.This question has also attracted the attention of other critics.[8]The case is,that as Patrick Swinden remarks,the play has much in common 'in its narrative strategy' with a play by Shakespeare.[9]The claim has also been made that a pattern of allusions links the novel with A Midsummer Night's Dream in such a way as to render worthless any reading of the novel which does not take this into account.[10] But the exact nature of the allusion linking the two works seems a matter of some doubt,for all the critics concerned agree that the novel also alludes to Othello.Patrick Swinden's statement of this dilemma seems to make most sense.He points out that 'the detail of the plot is derived from the comedies,but the shape of the whole is tragic'.[11]

It would further confuse the issue to suggest that at two moments in the novel there are clear references to The Tempest.One,as noted above, (see p 158) when Morgan quotes 'Full Fathom Five' to Peter.The second is when Simon,having put on a wreath of roses,asks the company who they think he is:

"Who am I? Puck? Ariel? Peaseblossom? Mustardseed?" (p 117)

These are specific references,although the second is perhaps deliberately confusing.The other specific reference is Julius's comment about staging

a 'midsummer enchantment,with two asses'.(p 236)

The position seems to be similar to the mythic references in Bruno's Dream,or even the connection between The Unicorn and the works of Sheridan Le Fanu.Iris Murdoch refers in a loose fashion to a very large range of other books.In most cases,the references are casual rather than of great significance.Her admiration of Shakespeare is very clear[12];what she admires in him is his ability to combine pattern with the representation of real and memorable characters.The allusions to Shakespearian texts (which are at their most frequent in The Black Prince's allusions to Hamlet,and The Sea,The Sea's allusions to The Tempest) are more moments of homage to that ability than studied links between novels and particular plays.Even in the cases of The Black Prince and TheSea,The Sea it is the use made by characters of Shakespeare that seems of more importance than the use made by the novels themselves.Richard Todd,after devoting a book to the subject,remarks that there is some problem 'in the precise nature of the allusion relating A Midsummer Night's Dream to A Fairly Honourable Defeat'[13],although he has earlier presented a view which seems to express the connection fairly well:

> what Iris Murdoch is doing with her Shakespearian interest is not so much constructing a roman a clef to fit A Midsummer Night's Dream as contemplating various Shakespearian devices in order to ask herself whether resource to these devices answers the problems which she feels herself to share with contemporary writers and thinkers,that we do not possess more than a 'far too shallow and flimsy idea of human personality'.[14]

But of far more value to the understanding of the novel than even this weak version of the theory of allusive connection,is an appreciation of the imagery developed out of Iris Murdoch's own ethics,particularly those,in which A Fairly Honourable Defeat is very strong,of the mechanical in life. The power and effectiveness of such chapters as that describing Morgan trying to rescue the pigeon from the escalator at Picadilly Circus Underground station (Part Two:Chapter Ten) suggest that the dominant idea behind the novel is not any allusion to Shakespeare,but the development

of her own thought within the form of the novel. Indeed, in this context it is worth recording a comment made by Iris Murdoch in conversation with Ronald Bryden some two years before the publication of A Fairly Honourable Defeat and possibly when she was working on the novel. Bryden asked her which writers had influenced her:

> "Nobody very surprising," she said haltingly, "I suppose the writer I owe most to is Shakespeare. That probably sounds rather presumptuous: what I mean is that I'd like to be influenced by Shakespeare . . ."[15]

Later in the same interview Bryden suggests that she likes

> to build her novels about communities, little Shakespearian courts often living under one roof. She was less willing to be detected there.
>
> "I recognize the court element, yes."[16]

The assumption about Shakesperian 'courts' is firmly entrenched in the critical sub-soil,[17] but seems worthwhile challenging it. Are there such recognizable courts in Shakespeare, particularly in the comedies? In the case of A Midsummer Night's Dream, which features particularly in this context, it is not Theseus's court which plays a dominant part in the play, but rather the more anarchic and unpredictable wood. The same is true of As You Like It and in Measure for Measure the court is to some extent devalued by the withdrawal of the Duke and the passing of power to Angelo. Of course, given the kinds of society featured in Shakespeare's plays there are courts; but are they of real significance?

In any event, one should note Iris Murdoch's own comments about both the influence of Shakespeare and also the presence of 'courts' in her novels. In this latter case she was willing to grant that there were courts but not that they were Shakespearian. It is possible that the influential figure here is Elias Canetti who, in Crowds and Power writes about the influence of kings upon their courts in terms of the kind of power relationship which is precisely the subject of such aspects of Iris Murdoch's novels.[18]

It is always difficlut to be precise about matters of influence, particularly in the case of such a widely read and allusive writer as Iris Murdoch, but it seems that the case for the direct influence of Shakespeare on this novel

has been overstated and is perhaps misleading in that in obscures the possible contribution of Elias Canetti to Iris Murdoch's images.

NOTES

1. See Robert Hoskins,'Iris Murdoch's Midsummer Madness',Twentieth Century Literature, 18,(1972) pp 96-103.He claims that Rupert is defeated because 'his attempt to derive systematic theory from instinct and experience and then to apply that theory to new experience fails because such theory is necessarily self-centred,restricted,heedless of contingency.' (p 99)

2. I do not mean here that Simon tells Hilda the truth,but that Simon, in a parallel situation to his brother,finally tells his 'spouse',Axel, the truth.

3. Iris Murdoch,A Fairly Honourable Defeat (London,1970) p 199.

4. There is a considerable similarity between this passage and that in The Nice and the Good,p 214,where Ducane's sense of the dreadfulness of egotism is expressed on his discovery of Radeechy's slaughtered pigeons in the vaults of Whitehall.

5. 'Full Fathom Five' is also used in The Sea,The Sea (p 364) to suggest the existence of the Good.It is,of course,a work of art which is concerned with the transformation of 'experience' into the timelessness of art.

6. See The Sovereignty of Good p 40 and above pp 16-18.
Rupert's notion recalls Michael Meade's view that James Tayper Pace has involve Toby Gashe in 'a machinery of guilt and repentance.'The Bell p 295.

7. Elizabeth Dipple (Work for the Spirit p 18) mentions 'a fairly obvious allegory of Christ,Satan and the human soul,in which Tallis plays Christ to Julius King's powerful Satan and Morgan's horrible human soul.His father Leonard plays an embittered God the Father,and his dead sister's dream variations represent the changing wisdom of the Holy Ghost.'
It may be 'fairly obvious' but seems to have escaped the notice of unaided critics.

8. See Richard Todd,Iris Murdoch:The Shakesperian Interest,Robert Hoskins, 'Iris Murdoch's Midsummer Madness',Patrick Swinden,Unofficial Selves, A.S.Byatt,'People in Paper Houses:Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Postwar Fiction',in The Contemporary English Novel edited by Malcom Bradbury and David Palmer,Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 18, (London,1979).

9. Unofficial Selves p 249.

10. See 'Iris Murdoch's Midsummer Madness' where Hoskins suggests that the technique of parody-inversion is essential to our understanding of the novel.

11. Unofficial Selves p 253

12. Demonstrated by the extended discussion of Hamlet,in the person of Bradley Pearson,in The Black Prince pp 158-167 and also by comments in 'Existentialists and Mystics' p 170 and John Haffenden,'John Haffenden talks to Iris Murdoch',Literary Review,58,(April 1983),31-35 (p 34.)

13. Iris Murdoch:The Shakesperian Interest p 101.

14. Iris Murdoch:The Shakesperian Interest p 81.

15. Ronald Bryden,'Talking to Iris Murdoch',Listener 4 April 1968,433-434 (p 434).

16. 'Talking to Iris Murdoch' p 434.

17.See Unofficial Selves p 249 and P.Conradi,'Metaphysical Hostess:the cult of personal relations in the modern English Novel',ELH 48 (Summer 1981), 427-453 (p 429):
'Husband and wife act as King and Queen over a small Shakesperian court of family,retainers and close friends;towards whom they show that mixture of altruism and acquisitiveness . . . that we remember,for example,in James's Ververs in The Golden Bowl.'
One might ask,why are the courts not Jamesian,if this is true?

18.Crowds and Power p 400.See above p 60.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN:AN ACCIDENTAL MAN

As does A Fairly Honourable Defeat,An Accidental Man (1971) takes as its starting point the relentlessly contingent world of London,but this time seen far less sympathetically.The world of the Tisbourne family and its entourage is seen as disturbingly materialistic,trivial and malicious, where the greatest pleasure is to watch someone else approaching disaster. The heartless and mindless gossip which dominates the novel is presented through a series of party conversations in which a large number of unidentified figures crow delightedly over the affairs of the rest of the cast.Their lack of identity establishes the moral tone of the novel's London,and offers an image of the spread out social world within which the action takes place.And that action reflects the world within which it is set,for,as Iris Murdoch remarked,she attempted to write a novel 'entirely composed of peripheral characters with no main characters'.[1] However,although there are no main characters,there are a group of characters who have significance in that they are at least aware of other possibilities,other ways of seeing things.

The London world can be summarised by George Tisbourne's career:he had wanted to be a mathematician but has opted for the life of a civil servant because

> before those cold Himalayas of the spirit his courage had fainted,and he had turned early away to the world of the warm,the lucrative and the easy.[2]

London is a city without any spiritual or moral dimension .Those who have some such awareness come from outside.Matthew Gibson-Grey,coming home from the East,sees London as a 'city not even wicked,but devoid of spirit,dusty, broken'(p 105).Although he is not able to provide any moral focus,is aware of the spiritual possibilities in the Buddhist monastery at Kyoto.Ludwig Leferrier,an American who is staying in England to dodge the draft for Vietnam,is kept aware of the moral aspect of his decision by his father's letters.Garth Gibson-Grey,who has just returned to London from New York,

carries with him the awareness of his moral limitations as he recalls seeing a man murdered and doing nothing to help save him.This group have experienced in the recent past acute moral dilemmas.Their awareness of their increasing worldliness and their consequently lessening sense of moral behaviour is set against the London world's total lack of moral concern.

Of course,moral issues occur for the Tisbourne's and their set,but they treat them as if they are mere matters of inconvenience rather than reasons for attending to another's needs.If there is any interest in such issues then it is the interest of self.Norman Monkley uses the death of his daughter Rosalind,knocked down by a car driven by Austin Gibson-Grey, as a means of blackmail and the chance to impose himself on Austin.Austin simply tries to evade his responsibilities by telling the police he was not driving.

Apart from the sections of party gossip,the novel contains passages which consist of letters written by members of the cast to each other,or to other parties who do not appear in the novel.Some of the writers do not otherwise appear.Of these,the most important is Ludwig's father, writing from the United States to urge his son to return to America to face the responsibilities of being an American citizen.He argues that Ludwig has a duty to return and fight a totalitarian government or at least to appear and put his refusal to fight in Vietnam to the authorities in person.These letters,quite significantly,are the only ones to carry a burden of moral terminology,thus suggesting that the moral vacuum in London is the result of a withdrawal from the real world.Ludwig,although deciding to stay in England and to marry Gracie Tisbourne,is aware that the Tisbournes' world is trivial.He is,however,absorbed by it despite his knowledge that

> elsewhere there were quite other and terrible things.He tried at intervals to talk to Gracie about these things but it seemed so portentous and artificial to trouble her happiness with this talk. (p 74)

will not face the ordinary moral issues which life contains,let alone the more terrible.To them,the existence of Dorina,Austin's unhappy and estranged wife,is simply a nuisance.

The death of Alison Ledgard,Gracie's grandmother,is a fine demonstration of the collective attitude.The real concern of the Tisbournes is what will happen to Alison's money,and they have no equipment to cope with her death. Their anxiety that the doctor should stay,and their subsequent wish that Mr Enstone,the priest,should come show their unwillingness to respond to Alison themselves.Comically,it is only by trying to avoid the personal demands of the situation that they do anything appropriate.Clara gets George to read the Bible to fill the void:but

> in some appalling way George and Clara had been right,as so often in some appalling way they were.The old words,whatever they meant, were filled with an irresistible authority.The words were at home in this scene.They had been here before.(p 38)

Again there is the sense that a moral response to a situation lies elsewhere, in this case in the past.Other than grasping materialism or comfortable hedonism there are no values in London.It is this that finally drives Ludwig back to the United States,leaving Gracie free to marry Garth.

Garth has come back to a London which he suits perfectly.Though he appears to be concerned about moral issues,and is certainly disturbed by his experiences in New York,he returns home exhibiting a kind of moral blankness.He claims that virtue is an illusion,but facing the death of Rosalind Monkley,reflects:

> He thought,this is what it is really like to look at death.He thought of the dark New York street and the cry of 'Help me' and the heavy body slowly let down into the gutter and the figure of himself walking on,walking on.That had been the text written in small letters.This now,the blankly sunny hospital ward,Mrs Monkley's clutching hand,her endless crying,her lips wet with tears,this was the text written in larger letters and held up before him.This was the rhetoric of the casually absent god.But

could he read it,and was it even meant for him to read?(p 187)

Garth feels that the accidentalness of this death,and its connection for him with the murdered man in New York and his failure to act through love,leave a gap,a total void,in the moral fabric of his life.He dimly sees that it is necessary to love the world and those in it,even given the dreadfulness of something like Rosalind's death;but he cannot do it. Garth is sucked into the cheap London world,turning his New York experiences into a best-seller and finally marrying Gracie.The final sign of his absorption by the trivial - a movement which starts when he announces on his return to London that he has given up philosophy - is the final party sequence with which the novel ends;for it is Gracie and Garth's first party.

But if Garth is sucked in by London,Ludwig escapes it.He returns to America and the possibility of imprisonment or of being drafted to Vietnam.[3] The change in their respective positions is marked by their responses to the death of Dorina.Garth's response is to feel a 'new interest in himself'(p 320) ,a sense of release from the past and a connection with his younger self.But Ludwig turns from himself and faces the moral realities of his situation.He feels that he is responsible for Dorina's death because he passes her by when deeply involved in his own misery.As a result of this,and feeling that she has somehow dropped out of the world,Dorina goes back to her hotel and kills herself,accidentally, when her electric fire drops into the bath.[4] Ludwig realizes that his selfish concerns have led to Dorina's death;he thinks about the incident in terms which recall Tallis Browne's meditation on the death of Rupert in the previous novel.[5]

> He did not blame Gracie.He did not think that Dorina had done it on purpose.The thing was pure chance and yet weighted with a significance of horror which he could not bear to contemplate. (p 317)

Ludwig's decision to return to America is made as a result of the same awareness of the presence of the self in the workings of the world.Ludwig

is the only character who exhibits any moral development.He comes to see that he is unimportant.His happiness,his Oxford career,do not matter as much as acting rightly.He comes to see with justice and with love,and as a result sees that he must return to 'bear witness',and that for him 'It didn't come out of myself,thought Ludwig,it seemed to come out of the issue,and that's what made it so clean'.(p 367) Ludwig behaves rightly here and it is perfectly clear that he does so.His action demonstrates Iris Murdoch's claim that 'true vision occasions right conduct'.[6]

If Ludwig leaves to take up the moral challenges presented by his situation,Matthew does not,but accepts that he will never be a good man. As he leaves with Ludwig he is ,as he was in the incident in Red Square which is a parallel to Garth's incident in New York,a spectator.[7] Yet Matthew knows how the good is to be found,in the Buddhist monastery at Kyoto,where he has dreamed of ending his successful career.But he knows that

> he could only have played at the contemplative life,only enacted it,producing something which might be very like the real thing but could not be the real thing.(p 103)

Matthew cannot achieve the 'real thing' because he is spoiled by his worldliness,which he sees as 'a kind of galloping sickness'(p 138) but which he cannot lose.Indeed,the expectations of the others around him almost force him into further worldliness,treating him as a figure of power and expecting him to exercise it.Matthew is expected to deal with the police and the blackmailing step-father,and the accidents that surround Austin simply reinforce Matthew's sense of power because he can cope.

When Dorina,planning to return to Austin finds him embracing Mitzi,she goes to Matthew.He calms her:

> Alone in the drawing room he finished the brandy.He felt excited, surprised,alert and satisfied,as if he had just added another marvellously beautiful object to his collection.(p 249)

He cannot resist enjoying the power which is confered on him by other people because of his success.As with the relations between the two brothers ,

Matthew wants to be seen to be in control.When Austin escapes from the spell,Matthew reflects on the irony of the situation:

> I came to set him free,thought Matthew.I came to change magic into spirit.It was all to be brought about by me.Now when it appears that somehow or other,by means which I do not even understand,he has got out,I ought to be glad.Did I really want to be his mentor and to set up as his judge? No.He has his desolation as I have mine, and let him be free of it.I wanted that bond to be cut,but I did not want to cut it myself.(p 352)

Matthew's final egotism is to think that it can all be done through him, in thinking so he is prevented from ever attaining the good.And yet, of all those in the novel he is the one who does the most good,and who has the best intentions.He is the victim of his own intelligence and ability. And he knows that this is so.He reflects on this after the final parting from Austin:

> When a man has reflected much he is tempted to imagine himself the prime author of change.Perhaps in such a mood God actually succeeded in creating the world.But for man such moods are times of illusion.What we have deeply imagined we feign to control,often with what seem to be the best of motives.But the reality is huge and dark and lies beyond the lighted areas of our intentions.(p 352)

Matthew's power and egotism lies at the other end of the spectrum from his brother Austin's sense of self.Austin has achieved no success,his life is a catalogue of failure and disappointment,and there is nothing about him which suggests that he deserves better.Yet he harbours a rage against the world,believing that behind the accidents that befall him there is a pattern.Austin simply refuses to accept that the world is a random chancy environment.His particular form of egoism is to see himself as the centre of a pattern of disaster,so when he loses his job near the beginning of the novel,he privately declares his refusal to rise above the situation. He positively wallows in his humiliation,and yet,for all Austin's nastiness, he is only the image of the egotist written slightly larger than in the

rest of the novel.As Mavis reflects at the end,as Austin battens on her:

> Of course he is a vampire,she thought.And this,she realized,had been somehow why she had smiled.And he knows it and he knows we know it.She pictured Austin's handsome cunning face,radiant with complicity. After all,he had accepted his accidents and if he always tried to turn them to account who could altogether blame him? Didn't we all do this? (p 363)

An Accidental Man is,in its moral vision,the bleakest of Iris Murdoch's novels,locating the operations of the ego not in an individual but almost in the social structure.[8] Its insistence that the centres of moral awareness exist,if at all,in places other than London is central to its bleakness. But it also makes a connection between the pursuit of the good,even though that is only in the monastery at Kyoto,and the ordinary exercise of virtue. Ludwig 'bearing witness' about the Vietnam war,and the unknown Russian whom Matthew sees in Red Square joining a crowd of demonstrators.Such individuals may not achieve the good,but as Matthew sees

> These are our real heroes.These are the people whose courage and devotion to goodness goes beyond any dream of one's own possibilities. Courage is after all,when sufficiently refined,the virtue of the age. It is always perhaps the only name of love which can mean anything to us.We speak of love because we are romantic,and we mean,however hard we try,something romantic by it.(p 231)

But these exercises of secondary virtue are not achievements of the good, although they may be made in the light of that concept. They are a worldly second-best,although they are great and admirable actions.But in the London of An Accidental Man such actions do not take place so great is the pressure of the self and of materialism.Love becomes a matter for party gossip,where malice and contempt play a greater part than attention and justice.

NOTES

1.'Talking to Iris Murdoch' p 434.She was expressing the hope that she would be able to do that.The interview took place in April 1968 and An Accidental Man was published in 1971.It is the most obvious candidate for a novel fitting this description.

2.Iris Murdoch,An Accidental Man (London,1971),p 19.

3.Todd suggests (Iris Murdoch:The Shakespearian Interest p 90) that Ludwig is imprisoned,and this is supported by the gossip of the novel's final scene.However,such gossip is not reliable (although it is important evidence) and in either case the point is that Ludwig faces the responsibilities which come with his position and accepts them courageously.

4.Bearing in mind the significance often attached in Iris Murdoch's novels to the sea and to water as an image of the limitless moral world,it is worth commenting that if Rupert's death in his swimming pool,in A Fairly Honourable Defeat (see above p 160),is an indication of the limitations of his moral world,then Dorina's death in the bath suggests an even more limited world.

5.A Fairly Honourable Defeat pp 398-399.See above p 160.

6.The Sovereignty of Good p 66.

7.Matthew describes this scene to Ludwig at pp 229-231.See also p 173 below.

8.Elizabeth Dipple (Work for the Spirit,p 198)sees An Accidental Man as 'the opening novel in a series dedicated to the varieties of human failures and defeats.An Accidental Man is utterly without amelioration,and even its most positive characters fail to achieve any ideal they might set for themselves.'

This view ignores the position of Ludwig at the end of this novel, and its general claim,based,as is the main argument of Dipple's book, on the failure of ordinary mortals to live up to the saintly demands of the good,is too harsh.Of course Iris Murdoch sees that people fail to achieve the good,but Dipple undervalues the achievement of secondary moral qualities by a whole range of characters.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE BLACK PRINCE

The Black Prince (1973) appears at first sight to be in the mainstream of Iris Murdoch's first person narratives in that it records the fantasies of its narrator, culminating in a change of moral perspective and a recognition that the world is other than it had been assumed to be. On this view, Bradley Pearson is an egotistical narrator, and his love for Julian Baffin more or less a figment of his imagination. There is much in the novel to support such a reading, particularly the 'Postscripts by Dramatis Personae' and the comments on Bradley's actions offered at times by Arnold and Rachel Baffin.

But the similarities with the earlier works are more apparent than real. On the surface, The Black Prince looks a more obvious candidate for inclusion in Steven Kellman's book The Self-Begetting Novel than does Under the Net. But there are reasons for its exclusion which, although perhaps not deliberate, are appropriate. Kellman defines the 'self-begetting novel' as one which

> projects the illusion of art creating itself . . . it is an account, usually in the first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading.[1]

The appropriateness of this to the earler first person narratives is undeniable, but, although The Black Prince would seem to be a further example of the type, there are important differences.

First of all, Bradley Pearson is already an artist, he does not become one during the novel. He claims that his story takes the form it does because he is an artist, not that the events described enabled him to become one. Secondly, Bradley does not develop as a character. It would be more accurate to say that he loses his personality in order to write the novel.

The Black Prince is not in the least concerned with the concept of character, which it sees as fundamentally egocentric. On the other hand, it is deeply concerned with people, for it is other individuals who make up

each person's world.It never examines the self either of its narrator or of any of the other figures who are involved in it.Bradley may be involved in the story as an actor,but he is not involved as a personality.His own description of Shakespeare's presence in Hamlet is appropriate:

> He enacts the purification of speech,and yet also this is something comic,a sort of trick,like a huge pun,like a long almost pointless joke.Shakespeare cries out in agony,he writhes,he dances,he laughs, he shrieks,and he makes us laugh and shriek oursleves out of hell. Being is acting.We are tissues and tissues of different personae and yet we are nothing at all.What redeems us is that speech is ultimately divine.[2]

It is by this kind of process that Bradley,too,can expunge his personality and turn the contingent events of his relations with Julian Baffin into art. By writing The Black Prince (that is the central 'Celebration of Love' rather than Iris Murdoch's novel) he both meditates upon his own personality and transforms it into the selflessness of art.

That Bradley is an artist is the central idea of the novel.He opens his account of the events leading up to his trial for the murder of Arnold Baffin by anouncing that he has resigned his position with the tax inspectorate and taken a cottage by the sea to give himself the peace and inspiration to write.And yet,since his retirement he has found it more difficult to write.Paradoxically,it is the plunge into the confused world of contingency announced by Francis Marloe's arrival rather than his escape to the sea that brings about Bradley's major work,The Black Prince itself.

Iris Murdoch has written that

> Art presents the most comprehensible example of the almost irresistible human tendency to seek consolation in fantasy and also of the effort to resist this and the vision of reality which comes with success.[3]

The Black Prince manages to combine a sense of that fantasy consolation with Bradley's struggle to see the reality of the events in which he has been involved.No other figure manages to win this struggle.It is ironic

that Bradley should come to this through a mass of contingency,for he despises his friend Arnold Baffin's work because it is too open to experience:

> I think I objected to him most because he was such a gabbler.He wrote very carelessly of course.But the gabble was not just careless and slipshod,it was an aspect of what one might call his 'metaphysic' . . .He saw significance everywhere,everything was vaguely part of his myth.He liked and accepted everything.And although he was 'in life' a clever man and an intellectual and a tough arguer,'in art' he went soft and failed to make distinctions. (The making of distinctions is the centre of art,as it is the centre of philosophy.) (p 152)

We are back here with the distinctions of Under the Net,with Arnold playing Jake to Bradley's Hugo.[4]Bradley claims that he is without theories,and his small literary production proclaims his allegiance to silence.And yet, as noted before,it is his involvement in a world of astonishing complexity and surprise,where chance dictates so much,that enables Bradley to break his silence and produce his artistic adventure story. Indeed,the events of the novel are a catalogue of truly Baffinesque complexity,reminding us that Baffin has claimed that curiosity is 'a kind of charity'(p 26),and suggesting that Bradley too learns that justice demands details and contingency rather than the 'ghostly incidents,a series of reflections about life and art'(p 37) which he aims to produce in retreat by the sea.

That Bradley sees Arnold as his 'strayed and alien alter ego'(p 152), and that he destroys Arnold's books and is,in some sense,responsible for his death,is related to the ideas about art which are being expressed in the novel.The same kind of relationship is to be found in the fact that it is Arnold's daughter Julian with whom Bradley falls in love,causing her at least temporarily to leave her father for him.The reasons for this change of allegiance in Julian are central to what the novel has to say about art and its relations to both truthful vision and fantasy consolation.If it is true that Bradley,the real artist,destroys the fantasiser,Arnold,then Julian's place with Bradley should be of greater significance than her place with

her father.

A.S.Byatt sees the distinction and the relationship between the two writers as follows:

> If Baffin is journalistic,Bradley is crystalline,holding the Murdochean,Eliotean ideal of impersonality and 'truth',believing in long suffering and apprenticeship,unable to speak at all.[5]

But this is clearly wrong because Bradley is able to break his silence and to produce his 'Celebration of Love'.

Both Bradley and Arnold feel that they are transformed by love.Arnold writes to Bradley telling him that he has fallen in love with Christian and that

> "I've been completely transformed as a writer.These things connect, they must do.I shall write much better harder stuff in future, as a result of this,whatever happens." (p 212)

However,there is no evidence that anything happens to Arnold as a writer, unless it could be said that he ceases to be one,for he dies before he produces any more work.Bradley,too,sees his love for Julian as connected in a fundamental way with his success as an artist.And in his case we do have the evidence of the novel itself,and also,perhaps,in their attitudes to Julian we can see whether the love of each is the transforming selfless just vision,or whether it is a fantasy,a possessive and egocentric corruption.

When Julian goes away with Bradley,Arnold is horrified.He has already locked her up to prevent her from seeing him,and he bursts in on them in the cottage by the sea,just after Bradley has been telling Julian that both love and artistic inspiration make one impersonal.(p 283) Arnold's repossession of his daughter hardly suggests that he is capable of selfless detachment.But Bradley,at least in time,can let Julian go.In his 'Postscript' he says:

> And Julian,I do not,my darling girl,however passionately and intensely my thought worked upon your being,really imagine that I invented you.Eternally you escape my embrace.Art cannot assimilate you nor thought digest you.I do not know.or want to know.anything

about your life.For me,you have gone into the dark.Yet elsewhere I realize,and I meditate upon this knowledge,that you laugh,you cry, you read books and cook meals and yawn and lie perhaps in someone's arms.This knowledge too may I never deny,and may I never forget how in the humble hard time-ridden reality of my life I loved you. That love remains,Julian,not diminished though changing,a love with a very clear and a very faithful memory.It causes me on the whole remarkably little pain.Only sometimes at night when I think that you live now and are somewhere,I shed tears.(p 339)

Here it is clearly possible to say that Bradley has been transformed by his love,and that he has achieved the fundamental moral step of not equating the world with his own projection of it.He achieves this because he is able to acknowledge that love involves an acceptance of chance and mortality and a sense that life is comic.To see the truth is to come to see this, as Bradley remarks to Loxias (p 55),and 'Art is the telling of truth'.And that truth cannot be exclusively personal.It must include the awareness of how one appears to others,however unflattering that may be.Bradley's love for Julian is sufficiently impersonal to allow him to accept her later view of him.Loxias,who is finally responsible for Bradley's story,since he 'made him tell' it (p 364),includes with Bradley's story the various 'Postscripts'.Apart from revealing the various versions of reality which can be produced by seeing it through different 'nets'[6],the 'Postscripts' continue the unselfing of Bradley.They culminate in the news of his death having revealed a world which cannot be contained within one man's view of it.Bradley can die because his love,as at the conclusion of Bruno's Dream,is the same as death.To love the world without self-importance is to recognize that one's presence is of no importance,and that one's absence makes no difference.

In The Unicorn,Denis Nolan told Marian that all creation suffers 'from being divided from God'.[7]In The Black Prince Bradley's loss of self brings him calm in the presence of his 'dear friend',Loxias.Loxias may not be God, but he/a manifestation of a god.He is a musician;more 'than one publisher

has reason to be grateful' to him (p 364),presumably for inspiring works of literature in the past.He is related to Apollo and also to the dark god Eros,the divine creative urge of whom Iris Murdoch writes in The Fire and the Sun.

> Plato's Eros is a principle which connects the commonest human desire to the highest morality and to the practice of divine creativity in the universe . . .
>
> Eros is the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels of the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality.[8]

Bradley dies in his prison cell,an image of the cave in Plato's The Republic,and like the prisoners who return to the cave from the upper air, his version of reality is not believed.Loxias,of course,is not restrained within the cave and assures us that he exists,even though there will be sceptics who assert that he is the 'invention of some minor novelist'(p 364). His existence is guaranteed by the existence of The Black Prince,which is, as Loxias tells us all art is,an adventure story:

> Art is to do with joy and play and the absurd.Mrs Baffin says that Bradley was a figure of fun.All human beings are figures of fun.Art celebrates this.Art is adventure stories . . . Of course it is to do with truth,it makes truth.(pp 362-363)

The truth that The Black Prince makes is to be found in Bradley's analysis of Hamlet,where the anonymity of the artist is insisted upon together with the unimportance of the self and any theories which may exist about it.The truth is that we are without identity,known only by our acts.[9] This analysis is supported by the remarks that Loxias makes at the end of the book,and it is also supported by the comments of Bradley at the very beginning of the story:

> All art deals with the absurd and aims at the simple.Good art speaks truth,indeed <u>is</u> truth . . . I am aware that people often have completely distorted general ideas of what they are like.Men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts,

> and not in any nutshell of self-theory.This is supremely true of the artist,who appears,however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work.(p xi)

And,it is almost needless to add,no more is the artist,or the man,known through the nutshell of theories produced by anyone else.The structure of The Black Prince,more than any other novel by Iris Murdoch,makes this clear.

The 'Four Postscripts by Dramatis Personae' oppose to Bradley's own view of things the views of others.But these conflicting accounts of events do not exclude each other.Bradley's account carries a dominance that is not simply a matter of a more extensive narration.It also has a more clearly defined awareness.Nonetheless,as reality is made up of individuals and their views of the world,it is part of that reality which is expressed in the 'Postscripts'.Here the characters speak for themselves,rather than as agents in Bradley's narrative,and by this device they achieve what Iris Murdoch has said she seeks in producing character,an opacity and individuality strangely at odds with the first person narration.The final effect of this is not to discredit Bradley's account,but to give a greater sense of an organic and complex life,in which individuals participate to a greater or lesser extent,and with greater or lesser success.The final beneficiary is not Bradley,but truth to reality,and hence art.It is therefore just that the final speaker in the affair should be not the protagonist but his friend,the impersonal yet loving figure of Loxias,whose friendship Bradley has only been able to achieve by experiencing and then celebrating love.

Bradley makes it clear that he is a changed man,not least by re-inhabiting his past self to recount the story:

> I shall,that is,inhabit my past self and,for the ordinary purposes of storytelling,speak only with the apprehensions of that time,a time in many ways so different from the present.So,for example,I shall say,'I am fifty-eight years old',as I then was.And I shall judge people,inadequately,perhaps even unjustly,as I then judged them,and not in the light of my later wisdom.(p xi)

But the presence of Loxias,as editor,ensures that this wisdom has been gained. The Black Prince is an excellent example of what Iris Murdoch means by her remark:

> The story is almost as fundamental a human concept as the thing, and however much novelists may try . . . to stop telling stories, the story is always likely to break out again in a new form . . . And if stories are told,virtue will be portrayed,even if the old philosophies have gone away.[10]

NOTES

1.Steven G.Kellman,The Self-Begetting Novel (London,1980) p 3.

2.Iris Murdoch,The Black Prince (London,1973) p 164.

3.The Sovereignty of Good p 64.

4.See Under the Net pp 90-91 and p 48 above.

5.'People in Paper Houses' p 35.

6.'Nets' here is used in Wittgenstein's sense.See Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 6.341 p 139.Cited above p 89.The most obvious of the nets displayed in the 'Postscripts' is Francis Marloe's Freudianism.

7.The Unicorn p 235.See above p 106.

8.The Fire and the Sun pp 33-34.

9.Kennedy (The Protean Self p 280) comments that Pearson is an anagram for 'persona',and suggests that Pearson is the author's persona. This seems a little over-ingenious and it also ignores the fact that Iris Murdoch uses a number of first-person male narrators (see above pp 82-83) who have some important features in common,even though it is argued above (pp 175-176) that Bradley Pearson is significantly different from the rest.

10.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 181.Cited above p 26.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE MACHINE

The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974) indicates in its title a new aspect of the 'mechanical', that tendency of the self to protect itself and to seek consolation rather than reality. In this novel the machine that drives most of the characters is a refusal to perceive the unity of the moral world, and a consequent division of what is actually one into separate and distinct categories. The title is taken from a painting by Titian, which actually receives no direct comment in the text, although a rather similar painting is discussed, but is used to suggest the basic similarity of such concepts of love. Profane love is sacred love, or turned into non-religious terms, it is a love of the transcendent goodness in reality and involves the death of the self. To divide the moral world into catogories means that the categorizer is not responding fully to the totality of experience but blinding himself by a fantasy. Love, which when exercised selflessly is a key to the good, becomes clouded by power and possession.

The novel uses Iris Murdoch's multiple plotting as a means to demand from the reader attention on a wide field. Even the major figures are at times thrown into shadow by enigmatic and mysterious minor figures, like Pinn or Kiki St. Loy, who indicate by their presence the opacity and elusiveness of human beings. The shifting focus of the multiple plots prevents any one character from dominating the reader's consciousness and thus denying moral value to other figures.

However, the major figures of Blaise Gavender, his wife Harriet and their neighbour Monty Small all exhibit the tendency to categorize the world rather then to experience it as a moral unity. To come to perceive that unity is a movement of increasing moral sophistication, as we are reminded by 'On God and Good':

> Reflection rightly tends to unify the moral world, and increasing moral sophistication reveals increasing u ity. What is it like to be just? We come to understand this as we come to understand the

relationship between justice and the other virtues.[1]

And that relationship is perceived through the process of attention, just as Harriet's attention to Giorgione's painting of St Anthony and St George reveals a unity transcending the apparent divisions:

> There was a tree in the middle background which she had never properly attended to before. Of course, she had seen it, since she had often looked at the picture, but she had never before felt its significance, though what that significance was she could not say. There it was in the middle of clarity, in the middle of bright darkness, in the middle of limpid sultry yellow air, in the middle of nowhere at all with distant clouds creeping by behind it, linking the two saints yet also separating them and also being itself and nothing to do with them at all, a ridiculously frail poetical vibrating motionless tree which was also a special particular tree on a special particular evening when the two saints happened (how odd) to be doing their respective things (ignoring each other) in a sort of murky yet brilliant glade (what on earth however was going on in the foreground?) beside a luscious glistening pool out of which two small and somehow domesticated demons were cautiously emerging for the benefit of Saint Antony, while behind them Saint George, with a helmet like a pearl, was bullying an equally domesticated and inoffensive little dragon.[2]

But although Harriet can give her attention to the picture, the pressures of her own life prevent her from maintaining the same calm, musing interest when she hears of her husband's infidelity.

Blaise Gavender has created two separate lives for himself, with his wife and with his lover, Emily McHugh. The second is sustained throught the fiction of Magnus Bowles, a patient of Blaise's. His lover, Emily, makes the nature of this split in his life quite explicit when she remarks, 'Oh I'm the flesh and she's the spirit, don't tell me, I know' (p 79), and Blaise knows that he has 'committed the sin against the Holy Ghost . . . by wilfully excluding the possibility of perfection' (p66). When Emily forces him to reveal her

he can actually maintain both his households.He is an unregenerate egoist, concerned only to have the best of both worlds by throwing himself on Harriet's mercy,not to be forgiven and to repent sincerely,but to be 'saved' as he puts it.Yet even as he plans to throw himself on Harriet's mercy, Blaise is acting from the self.He follows Monty Small's advice,including the suggestion that he conceal the full truth from Harriet by saying that he no longer loves Emily but regards her as a duty.Monty is a writer of detective stories,and his willingness to treat Blaise's life as plot material that can be manipulated as he desires,and Blaise's willingness to allow this to happen show how mechanised they have become.They treat the people in their lives as puppets,rather than giving them the attention they require.

And yet the crisis that Emily provokes for Blaise,and his associated discovery that his illegitimate son Luca has found his way to Hood House, offer him a real moment to see his world in a new manner.He remarks to Monty,in some anguish over Luca's discovery of his other home,that

> "It's the two worlds,suddenly one sees - they're really - one world after all."(p 109)

He cannot sustain that possible revelation,however, as he is too quick to give in to Monty's manipulative approach to his situation.

Monty is,of course,the mediocre artist.His fiction is an exercise of the ego rather than a disciplined self-negating work of art.His invention of Blaise's fictitious patient Magnus Bowles indicates the way in which fiction can serve the self and avoid reality.But although Monty appears to have a degree of insight into Blaise's character and situation,he uses his own fictions as a means of fantasy fulfilment,and also,like Blaise cannot escape from them.

> He even coldly asked himself,can I not turn all this misery into art, into real art,not the pseudo-art of Milo Fane? Can art for me ever be more than vile self-indulgence? This involved the question, can I <u>now</u> get rid of Milo? And this sent him back to the question of the calmness,the question of getting rid of himself.(pp.29-30)

Just as Monty is a mediocre artists,he is also a failed mystic.His attempts to seek a spiritual reality have led him to adopt the forms of Eastern mysticism,the yoga and the meditation.But this has not achieved any enlightenment.It has become,for Monty,a machine which runs at a moment's notice but which achieves nothing.

> By sheer diligence it was possible to set up a huge machine onto which one could gear oneself in a second.Some such machine existed, Monty had,in a number of years,created it.He had only to kneel,to droop his eyelids and take some deep breathes and the sensible world ceased to be.He knew at least enough to know that this,in his case, was merely an experience.(p 106)

Monty's spiritual life is vitiated because he cannot let go of his dead wife, Sophie.He has created a false world of the spirit around himself in which he sees her face in the mirror and feels her presence in the house.He even has a tape-recording of her voice,so that in a simply physical sense he will not lose her.

He cannot let go of Sophie for the same reason he cannot lose his own self;Monty is afraid of death.He has,as he tells Edgar Demarnay,been unable to treat Sophie as a dying person so that their conversation becomes a torment. He finally kills her,thus making her death seem accidental rather than inevitable (she had cancer).Similarly he is himself afraid of death because he cannot accept the simple disappearance of himself.This is why he describes his own meditation as 'merely an experience'.Monty's failure to achieve any mystical enlightenment is significant because it helps to define what Iris Murdoch means by the 'mystical'.[3] The achievement of the good is beyond all but the saintly perhaps,but Monty does not even begin the quest.

Nor does anyone else achieve it,although there are two figures who can be judged in terms of their achievement of worldly virtue.Neither are perfect,but their flaws are aspects of their humanity.Of the two, Harriet and Edgar,Harriet looks the better initially,but Edgar's acknowledgement of his flaws and limitations makes him a more valuable spokesman.

Harriet seems to be the figure who most obviously expresses Iris Murdoch's concept of love.Her attention to all forms of life - she rescues the caterpillars from the lettuce - and her love for her husband even when he has revealed Emily McHugh's existence and asked for her forgiveness seem to indicate a moral effort of the highest order.It begins to look as if the selfless love can be achieved without being the same as death.

But it is not like that.Harriet's efforts to love her husband despite the sudden change in her situation founder on a division of the real world into categories.She attempts to deny the real emotions that she feels and to cultivate a moral position as separate from them.She does not,in fact,approach the situation with a full moral awareness,for in her desire to forgive Blaise she fails to see him justly.Her love becomes,paradoxically, an opportunity to exercise power.When Blaise first tells her of Emily, he sees her

> glowing with an energy and a certainty,almost an exhilaration of moral force.Here was the gentle creature whom he had cherished and protected,whom he had feared to try.What a fool he had been. He felt her will,her strength,her new strength,the strength he had made in her by this ordeal.He had hoped for an angel's kindness,but he had not anticipated an angel's power.(p 131)

This power is ambivalent.It enables Harriet to avoid breaking down,to cope with the situation and with meeting Emily,but it changes her from the 'Mrs Placid' (as Emily calls her),into an egoistical power figure who sees herself at the centre of the universe.As she reflects upon her first meeting with Emily she congratulates herself on her self-control.But from this grows a broader sense of control.

> She was in control of herself,and as she suddenly realized with an absolutely new feeling of energy,she was simply in control. All these people now depended on her.She,and only she,could,if it were possible at all,help,heal,and avert disaster.(p 145)

She invents for herself a role,that of the all-forgiving wife,whose

strength will ensure her survival on her own terms.

That the new cosiness which she tries to impose on both Emily and Blaise is a fiction is revealed by the fact that Emily takes Blaise away from Harriet at the moment when she is about to impose it on them,at the party which she gives to welcome Emily into her extended family.As this dream collapses,Harriet turns to others;to the belief that she can love Monty, from him to Edgar,and is finally driven to run away with her son David and Luca,Blaise's child by Emily.David deserts her,and she is left in the lounge of Hanover airport with Luca.

Here,as she wonders why she has fled,Harriet achieves her greatest insight into her position.She sees that she is 'not the good person' she 'used to think' she was,and that had she accepted Blaise and Emily she would have done so with 'secret resentment and hatred' (pp 297-298). She sees that her flight has not been a bid for freedom,and that she has only the role that Blaise's egotism leaves her,that of second fiddle to Emily.She reflects:

> This kindness to him,which is just weakness really,is my only and my last resource.I shall come to it,I am coming to it,I am thinking exactly what he wants me to think,and the only escape from this is a kind of violence of which **I am not** capable.There is no great calm space elsewhere,thought Harriet,where a tree stands between two saints and raises its pure significant head into a golden sky.What had seemed to be an intuition of freedom and virtue was for her simply a trivial enigma,an occasion for little meaningless emotions.She was caught in her own mind and condemned by her own being.(p 299)

Any act of love which would enable her to cope with the situation which Blaise has created would require a denial of her self;of this she sees she is not capable.Virtue is not to be found in some other 'calm space' but in the contingent muddle of life coping with the egos of others and denying one's own.And at the moment of this realization Harriet is killed in a terrorist attack as she covers Luca with her body.She cannot achieve the good,but she can display the secondary moral quality of courage.

Throughout the novel the characters show an obsession with the state of their own minds.Harriet finally sees that she is 'caught in her own mind', in her conception of herself as a good woman,and that her willingness to accept Emily as either junior or senior partner is not goodness at all. Harriet has to face the fact that she has become part of the machine created by Blaise in his egotism.In this novel the ever-present dreaming ego is represented by an extraordinary number of dreams which characters have and analyse for themselves,and also by the fact that Blaise is an amateur psychologist who has set up as a healer.When he moves his base from Hood House to Putney he finds that he talks to his patients about his situation.'Blaise had spent the hour on each occasion talking about himself. His patients had eagerly played the analyst.'(p 230) This willingness suggests that analysis of others' minds is often a kind of examination of the self.

Set against this self obsession,although also subject to it to a degree, is the comic figure of Edgar Demarnay.At the end of the novel he can tell David

> One's mind is such an old rubbish heap.All sorts of little bits of machinery start up.Watch them awhile,then make a change.(p 315)

Edgar is a classical scholar and opposes to the twentieth century interest in analysis the ancient Greek world which had discovered 'That the universe is ruled by laws'(p 101).As is often the case,Edgar is a little drunk and fails to elaborate on what he means.However,it is clear from the rest of his comments,and in particular his splendidly comic intrusion into Harriet's party that he means moral as well as physical laws.In the same conversation with Harriet Edgar says that 'Unrequited love has always been my lot', and then goes on

> "Yet in a way unrequited love is a contradiction.If it's true love, it somehow contains its object.There's proof of God's existence like that."(p 102)

Edgar's always unrequited love (for Monty,for Harriet,for David at different times in the novel) is a splendidly comic realization of the selfless love

which is Iris Murdoch's ideal.In the real world Edgar's profane and unrequited love is the love which is of moral value.There is no other available elsewhere,but in the muddled contingent world of the novel it enables him to make a number of judgements which show his clear vision. He tells Harriet when he enters her party drunk,with his trousers torn from climbing the fence,

> One must be in the truth and you are not.You must come away so that he can see what he has done.As it is he sees nothing.This is a lie,this man's lie,and he must live it and undo it.But you have put him in a position where he cannot stop lying.No one here, not even you,is good enough to redeem this thing.(p 185)

Similarly he can tell Monty that he must let Sophie go(p 263) and not brood on whether she had lovers in the past.Edgar cannot always act in the way that he sees is necessary for others.He is a deeply flawed being,as his drunkenness suggests,and as his failure to accept Harriet's love when at the time it seems he could have Monty's confirms.But despite his flaws, which are seen as essentially human,Edgar offers the key,not to the mystical transcendence of the world and the achievement of the distant perfection,but to the ordinary human conduct which is the start on that long road.He says to David:

> "I mean just that one's ordinary tasks are usually immediate and simple and one's own truth lies in these tasks.Not to deceive oneself, not to protect one's pride with false ideas,never to be pretentious or bogus,always to try to be lucid and quiet.There's a kind of pure speech of the mind which one must try to attain.To attain it is to be in the truth,one's own truth,which needn't mean any big apparatus of belief.And when one is <u>there</u> one will be truthful and kind and able to see other people and what they need."(p 314)

As no one else can,Edgar can see the unity of the moral world.The simple and immediate moral actions lead eventually to the distant perfection, although how far distant that is the behaviour of Edgar makes clear.[4]

NOTES

1. The Sovereignty of Good pp 57-58.

2. Iris Murdoch, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (London, 1974) pp 41-42.

3. See 'Existentialists and Mystics'.
Note also the following:
'The mystical experience consists in a conscious, deep, and infinite union of the soul with God who has taken the iniative therefor; while the Soul, on its part, has prepared itself, normally according to an accepted pattern of asceticism. This is no new thing, of course, but is part of the developed doctrine of prayer down the centuries, and in this sense 'mysticism' dates from New Testament times. What a credulous public delights in as 'mystical phenomena' - levitation, ectasies, trances, and the like - are unimportant. They are regarded as inessential, and as much a hindrance as a help.' Clifton Wolters, 'Introduction' to Dame Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1966) p 25.

4. Elizabeth Dipple (Work for the Spirit p 241) describes the ending of the novel with Edgar as asserting 'the ascendance of the mediocre life and the hopelessness of most moral endeavour'. As noted above (p 174), this ignores the positive value of Edgar's acceptance of a secondary moral task which is within the reach of humanity. Dipple seems not to have fully appreciated the importance of the insistence in The Sovereignty of Good of the impossible distance of the good, but of its significance as a goal which illuminates and informs the lower stages of the quest. (See The Sovereignty of Good pp 30-31, 60-62, 92-101. See also pp 13-26 above.) Dipple's view lacks the charity and knowledge of human frailty that characterises both Iris Murdoch's novels and her ethics.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: A WORD CHILD

A Word Child (1975) and The Sea, The Sea (1978) are the two most recent of Iris Murdoch's first person narrations.[1] They share, in a particularly developed form, an interest with the past and its relationship with the present which was an aspect of The Nice and the Good, Bruno's Dream and An Accidental Man. However, in these two novels there is a sense in which the past is actually present in the narration, for their narrators re-enact the crucial areas of their pasts in the course of the books. In both cases they discover that the past, which they thought to be static and complete, can be changed by the discovery of new knowledge.[2] Both narrators brood upon the past; Charles Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea tries to revivify his childhood love while Hilary Burde's second involvement with Gunnar Jopling leads to the re-enactment of the drama of Hilary's responsibility for the death of Jopling's wife. The past is, in a sense, brought back to life again by the refusal of the protagonists to let it go. The repetition of central events in their lives suggests that they have failed to make moral progress from the point in time when the first events occured. Not for nothing is Peter Pan continually present in A Word Child.[3]

Both these two novels continue to develop Iris Murdoch's sense of goodness as an impossibly distant goal. Earlier first person narrations, such as Under the Net and A Severed Head, imply that their narrators have made enough moral progress to turn their egocentric dramas into art. The Black Prince has a more complex version of this process. But both A Word Child and The Sea, The Sea are more aware of the almost inevitable failure of humankind to escape the ego. In A Word Child Crystal's quotation from the Bible can still serve as a guiding light:

> Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things sre honest, whatsoever things are just, think on these things.[4]

even though those very qualities have been obscured by Hilary's determination to think that the world has deprived him of his position at Oxford

and forced him into his lowly existence.At the end of the novel the position is open.Hilary has emerged,with the death of Lady Kitty,from the pattern of days which he has allowed to rule his life.The quasi-chapters,each headed by a day of the week,cease at that point in the novel,to be succeeded by continuous narrative.The Peter Pan refusal to grow up is over at least in that Hilary decides not to burden Crystal with his new guilt,but whether Hilary will escape himself is left deliberately unclear.Perfection is out of the question,although Hilary may manage to 'think on' the secondary moral qualities of truth,honesty and justice.

Although Hilary is,by his own admission 'a monster of egoism' in whom there will be 'no improvement'(p 68) he is nonetheless presented with a considerable degree of understanding and tolerance.His egotism and desire to protect himself may be extreme,but they are felt to be similar in kind if not in degree to very common human instincts and activities.This does not undermine Iris Murdoch's moral concerns,but makes the reader participate more fully in them.We are not just enjoined to give our attention to an morally unattractive figure but are actually aided in this by the point of view of the novel.The human ego is there,and must be accepted and understood as an aspect of reality.In 'Existentialists and Mystics' Iris Murdoch remarks that even mystical novels retain something of the existentialist hero,so prevalent is this view.[5] Despite locating the good beyond the self,Iris Murdoch can see Hilary's wounded existentialism,his desire to lash back at the world,as a human response to his past.

Hilary's inadequacies stem from his childhood,as is appropriate for a novel concerned with both the past and Peter Pan.He tells us that he was a violent boy to whom nobody gave their attention:

> When the light of memory falls I was already as it were old,old and scarred and settled in a posture of anger and resentment, a sense of having been incurably maimed by injustice. (p 18)

And this sense persists,despite the attention of his wonderful schoolmaster, Mr Osmand,to lead him to the belief that the whole world works against him. His feelings about the past are governed not by what he has done,but by

the sense that he has been found out,an attitude which he attributes to his experience in the orphanage.He is not prepared to accept his responsibility for what he has done until forced to see how his own egotism is responsible for the death of Lady Kitty.Instead he produces a fantasy world where the universe conspires against him and he forces others, specifically Crystal,to share the deprivation which his first crime has brought him.In a moral sense he never leaves his childhood,and his subsequent actions are seen as the result of this rather than of any other psychological damage inflicted on him.Hilary's life takes place in a series of cave-like places:his flat,the Room (where he works),and the Underground.

> I prefered the dark however.Emergence was like a worm pulled from its hole.I loved the Inner Circle best . . . It was a fit place for me,I was indeed an Undergrounder.(p 38)

Hilary does not use the Circle for going anywhere,any more than he uses his knowledge of languages for speaking to anybody,but as an aspect of the routine by which he lives.He has deliberately made his life mechanical in order to avoid his own moral life.As he puts it at the end:

> I had spoilt my talents and made myself a slave,not because I sincerely regretted what I had done,but because I ferociously resented the ill-luck which had prevented me from 'getting away with it'.What had impressed me really was not the crime itself but the instant and automatic nature of the first retribution,the loss of Oxford,my 'position' and the fruits of my labour . . .
>
> As so often,as in my own childhood,guilt sprang from the punishment rather than from the crime.And I perpetuated my suffering out of resentment.(p 381)

At the very beginning of the novel it is made clear that Hilary's determination to live by rules 'separates everything from everything'(p 8) and is 'anti-life'(p 12).And yet the mechanical continuation of this system is connived at by others,either because,like Crystal,they are afraid of him,or because they can use him for their own ends - as Laura Impiatt does in using him as cover for her affair with Christopher.The mechanical

in life is ultimately self-generating,the egoism of one person catching at the egoism of another.Hilary is not the only figure in the novel who cannot see others because of a pattern which has been imposed on reality. Lady Kitty explains that she and Gunnar have failed to see Hilary as he is:

> "You've been a sort of huge mythological figure to both of us for years,you've been <u>there</u>,behind everything.You've been a sort of fate - or a kind of awful - god - in our lives - or a huge ghost that's got to be laid,only it seemed you never would be."
> (pp 193-194)

For the major actors in the drama initiated by Hilary's first crime (Hilary himself, Gunnar Jopling and Lady Kitty) coming to terms with the past is largely a question of maturity.They have to move beyond a childish sense that the universe has done them an injury.They have to accept the power of chance and accident in their lives and learn to forgive those who seem to bring disaster to them.

It is one of the interesting features of this novel that the concept of forgiveness which it uses seems to operate in an unusual direction.The novel insists that not only must Gunnar forgive Hilary for causing the death of his wife,but that Hilary must forgive Gunnar.Hilary reaches this conclusion as a result of a drug-induced vision which is caused by him eating a cake laced with LSD.His consumption of the cake is largely accidental (p 297),and when he recovers he dismisses the formula as 'verbal nonsense'(p 307).But the substance of his vision is central to Hilary's moral development.Under the influence of the drug he can let his self go sufficiently to see that

> There was nothing else needful.Just to forgive.Forgiving equals being forgiven,the secret of the universe,do not whatever you do forget it.The past was folded up and in the twinkling of an eye everything had been changed and made beautiful and good.(p 298) [6]

Back in the waking world his ego is too strong for him to act upon this formula,or to explore the significance of its meaning.'Forgiving equals being forgiven' is a gnomic statement whose portentousness is not analysed

in the novel,although the fact that Crystal uses the same formula indicates both its significance and its meaning.Crystal is urging Hilary to see Gunnar again.He says:

> "It can never be perfect.He can never forgive me."
>
> "That's not the point,"said Crystal."What you must do is forgive him.That's what will make it perfect.If you forgive him then there'll be - a kind of open space - and he'll be able -"(p 306)

What Crystal appears to mean here is that for Hilary to forgive Gunnar means that he will no longer believe that Gunnar is somehow an agent of the world's attack on him.Hilary must come to accept that there is much that is random and accidental in the history of his relations with Gunnar, and cease to see it all as a plot to humiliate himself.

Hilary's furious resistance to the idea that he must forgive Gunnar is the result of his need to maintain a fixed sense of the past in which Gunnar is some kind of monster.Crystal is able to tell Gunnar that she loves him and,as a result,to talk to him not as some awful beast but as an ordinary being.The two of them,by talking without the mythology of their pasts coming between them,demonstrate that moral progress can be made at a simple level by forgetting the self and giving attention to others.From such a movement emerges the fact that destroys Hilary's conception of the past and suggests that it is not a fixed body of knowledge,but a mysterious depository of new information,fact and attitude. Crystal's revelation that she slept with Gunnar the night that his first wife died changes the past, or would if Hilary would allow himself to see its implications.For Crystal, Gunnar is an individual with needs and desires of his own.Her action shows that Gunnar is not merely an agent in Hilary's life,which is how he sees him,but a distinct individual.But Hilary can only come to see that after his egotism has provoked the second tragedy of Lady Kitty's death.

Crystal's ordinary treatment of Gunnar,extending to the very ordinary supper of fish fingers and peas that she gives him,and the suggestion that it is through such ordinary decencies that moral progress is made,are part

of a sub-plot of characters who display the ordinary face of goodness.They do not participate in the dramas of success and power which extend down even to the lower echelons of the office,but show a concern for others and for fundamental decency.Crystal's selflessness is clear throughout the novel,but her boy friend,Arthur Fisch is less easy to see.We are given only Hilary's dismissive account of him,and his own statements lack the fluency of Hilary's own narration.Yet Arthur is the novel's spokesman for the good.He objects to Hilary meeting Lady Kitty,and says that he must say sorry to Gunnar as 'emotions are mechanical,but one's got to get past mechanism'(p 289).When Hilary accuses him of being simple-minded and sounding like a theologian,Arthur replies:

> "I think one should try to stick to simplicity and truth.There may be no God,but there's decency and - and there's truth and trying to stay there I mean to stay in it,in its sort of light,and trying to do a good thing,and to hold onto what you know to be a good thing even if it seems stupid when you come to do it.You could help yourself and Crystal,you could help him,but it can only be done by holding onto the good thing and believing in it and holding on, it can only be done sort of - simply - without any dignity or - drama - or - magic -"(p 290)

Arthur's lack of fluency and social insignificance place him in the tradition of good men in Iris Murdoch's novels.But there is a special significance in this inability to express what he wants to say in a novel called A Word Child.That Arthur finds it difficult to say what he means is not a reflection of his lack of intelligence,although Hilary is quick to see it thus.It is because of what he is speaking about that he finds difficulty.In The Idea of Perfection Iris Murdoch agreed with Moore that the good is indefinable,[7] and in the case of the mother-in-law who comes to see her daughter more justly claims that 'her activity is hard to characterize not because it is hazy but precisely because it is moral'[8].Arthur's behaviour is the same.It may appear fumbling and imprecise,even comic as he strives to express unknowable concepts.but his behaviour is moral and as such seeking to extend the

boundaries of perception and therefore of language.[9]

And Arthur's case is paralleled by Hilary in the end.It is only after the disaster of Lady Kitty's death that he can both see and accept that he is not the centre of the world,and that his absorption with his earlier loss of position has led him to ignore claims on him,like those of Clifford Larr who dies of 'being unloved and uncared for'(p 380).Hilary is forced by the disaster to drop the rules that protect him from the world,and to see that words are not only rule governed but refer to the external world and are a means of exploring that world.Meditating in St Stephen's church on his responsibility for the deaths of Anne,Clifford and Lady Kitty,he gets up to leave:

> There was also,I saw,a memorial tablet which asked me to pray for the repose of the soul of Thomas Stearns Eliot.How is it now with you,old friend,the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings being over? Alas,I could not pray for your soul any more than I could for Clifford's.You had both vanished from the catalogue of being. But I could feel a lively gratitude for words,even words whose sense I could scarcely understand.If all time is eternally present all time is unredeemable.What might have been is an abstraction, remaining a perpetual possibility only in a world of speculation.[10] (pp 383-384)

Hilary discovers that words have meanings because he learns that the past cannot be distorted by what he hopes 'might have been'.In the final analysis his horror that Crystal's revelation has 'changed the past' leads to an acceptance that he has not seen it clearly and justly.All time is eternally present for Hilary because of what he was,which he carries with him.By refusing to pass on his responsibility for the new horror to Crystal he avoids a second attempt to evade the past.Whether he proceeds to look with love and justice at the world is left open,though the signs are hopeful. Not only does he let Crystal go to marry Arthur,but he accepts the sheer accidentalness of Gunnar finding out from Tommy of his association with Lady Kitty.For Hilary,a world composed of chance and mortality is finally seen to be without a malicious pattern

NOTES

1. Excluding The Philosopher's Pupil which is something of a hybrid. See above p 82.

2. Hilary says to Crystal, "You've changed the past," (A Word Child p 253). In The Sea, The Sea Charles says that James has 'in a moment' "spoilt the past" (p 410).

3. The references to Peter Pan are many in the novel. Much discussion revolves around the planned office pantomime, which is, of course, Peter Pan. Elizabeth Dipple (Work for the Spirit p 217) suggests Crystal's connection with the Peter Pan theme:

'The connection with Peter Pan persists not only through Hilary's personality, but also through Crystal's possible role as a Wendy who plays the mother to the various lost and abandoned boys of this Peter-Panish tale. . . Like Wendy in Barrie's novel, she grows up and marries, and is thereby forever alienated from the Never-Never Land of the Peter Pan fantasy. Inasmuch as Hilary is a version of Peter Pan, her marriage and entrance into the ordinary world of family life causes her essentially to lose him.'

This is rather similar to Todd's attempt to show definite allusions to A Midsummer Night's Dream in A Fairly Honourable Defeat (see above pp 161-164), and to German's effort to chart allusions in Iris Murdoch's novels (see above p164). Dipple seems a little hesitant about pushing the connection - she writes of Crystal's 'possible role as a Wendy' - but is still committed to a rather over-precise sense of allusive connection. It should be noted that it is Hilary who releases Crystal from his Never-Never Land by deciding not to tell her of his involvement with Lady Kitty's death. Dipple's account suggests that she 'escapes'.

4. Philippians 4.8. Gunnar tells Hilary that Crystal has said this to him during their meeting. Iris Murdoch, A Word Child (London, 1975) p 325).

5. See 'Existentialists and Mystics' p 173.

6. The similarity of Hilary's formulation to that of John Ducane as he waits for the tide to rise in Gunnar's Cave (the name is perhaps a significant connection) should be noted. See The Nice and the Good, p 305, and p 141 above.

7. The Sovereignty of Good p 42. See above p 13.

8. The Sovereignty of Good pp 17-18. See above pp 15-16.

9. See Wittgenstien, Tractatus para 5.6: 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.' See also pp 16-20 above for an account of how Iris Murdoch believes we come to learn and use ethical concepts.

10. The final sentence is from 'Four Quartets: Burnt Norton', lines 4-8. T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1909-1962, (London, 1963) p 189.
Elizabeth Dipple comments (Work for the Spirit p 223):
'In this novel where every work of art mentioned is weighed against the context of action, this passage takes on particular relevance: a giant step has been taken from Hassan and Peter Pan to the adult and profound recognitions of temporarilty in the Four Quartets, and Hilary for the first time is capable of seeing words as the vehicle of profound meaning, meaning that bears directly on his own misrepresentations and now painfully increased knowledge. Not only has he escaped the bondage of his 'days', but words break out of their narrow bondage into the world of poetic statement.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN:HENRY AND CATO

Whereas A Word Child is concerned with the past as human history, the events which show what a man is,Henry and Cato (1976) concerns itself with the past as heritage.Henry Marshalson,through the death of his brother Sandy,finds himself the owner of Laxlinden Hall with its chimney piece by a pupil of Grinling Gibbons and its seventeenth century tapestry.Whereas Hilary Burde retreats into the Underground and his rules,Henry has retreated to America to escape the awareness that he is a younger son.Sandy's death brings him back to confront his place in the Old World,a place which is very much defined by the things it contains.Similarly,the New World is suggested not only by American attitudes but by American architecture:

> St Louis was vast and lonely,and lost Henry delighted in its besieged loneliness.He loved its derelict splendours,the huge ornate neglected mansions of a vanished bourgeoisie,the useless skyscraper-tall steel arch through which the citizenry surveyed the view of shabby warehouses and marshalling yards on the Illinois shore.The empty palaces beside the immense eternal river:what an impressive image of the demise of capitalism. [1]

Henry and Cato is a novel where the things of the world matter very much, as if what one owns,or where one inhabits,suggest what one is,[2] and Henry's new inheritance has to be come to terms with as a way of discovering who and what he is.Henry returns to England trailing some of the ethos of the New World behind him,and that alien ethos is brought firmly into the novel by the letters from his American friends,Russ and Bella:

> They (Russ,Bella,The Americans) seemed to have no way of taking things for granted,but assumed a regime of perpetual change wherein they unceasingly asked:am I developing,am I succeeding,am I fulfilled,am I good? This made unpredictability a right and the constant exercise of will a duty.Psychoanalysis,which might ideally produce a humble self-awareness,seemed to Henry in this heroic scene to promote a restless nervous desire for change and improvement.(p 6)

A desire which Henry reflects after his return to England,for his first thought,faced with his mother's absorption in her grief for Sandy,is to destroy all that remains to him and to dispose of the Hall itself:

> Henry felt he was huge,like a giant,like an ancient hero,and the other people with whom he had to deal were huge too,and brilliantly coloured,under a sky as cloudless and brilliant as that of Max's Fisher King . . .he was a creature of some higher destiny,a creature of the gods.Why had he got to get rid of his inheritance? He did not even many more know why.He **just had to transform all these objects,** these things and spaces,into clean disposable money,and then to get rid of the money and be - what - free,good? (p 177)

Henry's New World desire for change is seen as an aspect of egoism,an interest in the self which is reflected by his interest in the work of Max Beckmann,a German expressionist painter whose image in his own paintings Henry envies for its 'vast self-confidence,that happy and commanding egoism' (p 5).Opposed to these New World interests and images are those of the Old World:Laxlinden itself,its Flemish tapestry representing 'Athena seizing Achilles by the hair' (p 9) and Titian's 'Diana and Actaeon' in the National Gallery.The moral authority of these Renaissance works of art is partly derived from their connection with the past,and partly from their depiction of mortals powerless in themselves and subject to the arbitrary and total power of the gods.When Henry first sees the tapestry on his return to Laxlinden he thinks 'I wish I had a goddess to grab me by the hair and tell me what to do' (p 54).By the end of the novel he has found Colette Forbes who tells him that she will marry him and that he will not sell the Hall.Both events take place.

But while Henry seeks to sell the Hall he is trying to live a heroic role,both as a New World desire for change and also as an act of spite at his mother and his dead brother.His heroic self-image is indicated by a series of epithets used with his name in the earlier part of the novel. (In two pages he is 'Awakening Henry','luxurious Henry','Private Henry' (p 3) and 'Alienated Henry','lost Henry' (p 4).There are numerous other examples.[3])

Henry is living out an egoistic fantasy in which he finally supplants his elder brother,even to the point of planning to marry Stephanie,who presents herself as Sandy's mistress.But although Henry has a healthy and active ego,he is no monster of egoism like Hilary Burde.His manic activity - always running up and down stairs,coming to hasty decisions and rushing out and buying new cars - reflects the difficulty of the task facing him.He chooses to act like a New World American,and receives the approval of Russ and Bella for it,because he wants to achieve something significant and he has acquired an American value for change during his sojourn there.When,on his arrival back at Laxlinden,he hears of Cato's mission in Ladbroke Grove,his image of it as a kind of stripped holiness provides him with something to emulate which fits nicely his wishes.

But Henry's vision of Cato and his mission is as flawed as Cato's own attempt at holiness.Ironically,Cato,too,is in revolt against his past, although in his case it is his father's Quaker-based rationalism which he is in revolt against.His conversion to Catholicism,as a radical move which is entirely disapproved of by his father,parallels Henry's belief that he has cleared some kind of moral hurdle in deciding to sell Laxlinden Hall.Cato sees his discovery of God in terms of Plato's myth of the cave:

> He entered quite quietly into a sort of white joy,as if he had not only emerged from the cave,but was looking at the Sun and finding it was easy to look at,and that all was white and pure and dazzling,not extreme,but gentle and pulsating silently inside the circle of the Sun. (p 26)

But by the start of the novel's action Cato is convinced that there is no God.His failure of faith and his effort to make his love for the petty criminal,Beautiful Joe,the centre of his life is the major spiritual subject of the novel.And that effort takes him from the certainty that he has lived in the light of the sun to the real darkness of the underground prison where he is locked up by Joe.The experience helps him see that he has not attained a stripped spirituality,that he has not left the

cave at all,but is bound there by the egoistic belief that only he can save Joe.

It is Brendan,Cato's spiritual mentor,and the one spokesman for the good in the novel,who points out that this belief is a dream[4]:

> "Ordinary human consciousness is a tissue of illusion.Our chief illusion is our conception of ourselves,of our importance which must not be violated,our dignity which must not be mocked."(p 144)

For Iris Murdoch,of course,egotism is the most common of all human failings,[5] but the significance of her novels lies in the way in which this general flaw manifests itself in a variety of situations.In Henry and Cato the workings of the self are more subtle than the destructive restriction of Hilary Burde,and they move both Henry and Cato into areas which they are not capable of handling.Henry's wish to sell the Hall and Cato's attempt to save Beautiful Joe are both acts which take too little account of the things of the world,whether they be Flemish tapestries or Joe's life. Both finally come to see that stripped spirituality is not for them;that can only be attained by saints like Brendan.The differences in their feelings about this new state of affairs show differences in their level of aspiration and also in what they have learnt.Henry,when he has decided not to sell the Hall,remarks to Colette concerning that earlier plan:

> "It's above my moral level.That's been my trouble all along, mistaking my moral level.The idea of selling everything and clearing out,that was far above me."(p 321)

Henry learns the value of the things which are his world,and also learns humility before the past.He does not get rid of things,but continues the tradition.At the end of the novel he is seen as a kind of twentieth century squire,planning improvements to his estate and thinking of building a model village in the grounds.Elizabeth Dipple sees Henry differently when she says he survives is 'a comfortable world by retreating into (his) egotism',[6] but this fails to take account of the change in Henry.In recognising his 'moral level' he comes to see the necessity of accepting the world as it is rather than trying to impose himself on it.That is a

considerable moral step and Iris Murdoch in developing her concept of the good to the point where it can only be pursue by the saintly needs to introduce a moral concept for lesser mortals.In Henry and Cato the notion of seeing oneself clearly enough to know and accept one's limitations is expressed in Henry's idea of his 'moral level'.

Cato's acceptance of the need to find one's 'moral level' is less happy than Henry's because he has staked more on his belief that he can save Joe, but nonetheless he is forced into accepting the reality of the situation. Rather than saving Joe,Cato kills him when he breaks out of his prison and bursts in on Joe's seduction of Colette.Having killed Joe,Cato sees

> "that there are no barriers,there never were any barriers,what one thought were barriers were simply frivolous selfish complacent illusions and vanities.All that so-called morality is simply smirking at yourself in a mirror and thinking how good you are.Morality is nothing but self-esteem . . . And when self-esteem is gone there's nothing left but fury,fury of unbridled egoism."(p 295)

But when this despair begins to leave him Cato can look for his 'moral level' which is to be found in the acceptance of his family and home.Brendan. on the point of leaving for India,tells him to go home 'and complete their happiness'(p 340).Brendan also tells Cato that he has made 'a start'(p 336) by falling in love with Joe,and his suggestion that Cato should return to his family implies that Cato's 'moral level' will be found if he can learn to love without giving in to the ego which bedevilled his affair with Beautiful Joe.

And in Cato's sister,Colette,there is an appropriate figure to learn from.She is in effect the goddess who grabs both Henry and Cato by the hair and tells them what to do.She marries Henry but provides both of the men with an image of significance when they are in extremity.While he is imprisoned by Joe,Cato looks into the perfect darkness of his cave,and

> saw Colette looking at him with a look of immense tenderness,and then with an air of sadness turning her head away.With an intense concentrated quietness of transformation,Colette's face had become

> the face of the Redeemer,and the Redeemer had huge eyes luminous as a cat's,staring at him out of the darkness,yet there was a bright light all about.And Cato could see the tendrils of hair that flowed about the beloved head,and the way the beard grew.(p 268)

In the absence of God,Cato's love for his sister is the way to Christ.The identification of Christ and Colette here prefigures the much more striking vision of Christ which Anne Cavidge has in Nuns and Soldiers.[7]The same point is being made:Christ is a person,not a God,and he is to be found in the here and now rather than in any other world.In the sensory deprivation of his prison Cato turns to his sister;it is she who provides what little light penetrates the cave of his mind.Similarly,Henry,picturing the awful darkness he must enter as a police decoy,finds that Colette is something of value beyond himself.

> If it had not been for one thing,Henry Marshalson would now have been simply a single quaking mass of solipsistic dread.The one thing was the thought of Colette . . .
>
> The thought of Colette was something extra,an extra pain,an extra grace,and though Henry was not then capable of thinking of it in that way,his anguish for Colette helped him a little by diverting his attention from himself.(pp 259-260)

Colette is not only a centre of value beyond the selves of Henry and Cato,where they can begin to learn what it is to love selflessly.She also displays that quality herself.She wishes that Joe had not been killed,and says that she would have loved him;when Cato is in despair she opposes her father's rationalist irritation with his son by telling him,"What we must do is hold him in our thoughts very sort of tenderly and lovingly -"(p 304); and she simply loves Henry even through his affair with Stephanie.She sees her love for him as a fact about the past,something which has always been there,as she tells him in a letter (p 184),and something which,like the Hall,must be taken account of and acted upon.

Henry and Cato sees that the good is beyond all,except saints like Brendan Craddock.But it also suggests that by accepting the world as it

and not seeking too officiously to impose oneself on it,by loving as selflessly as one can,and by behaving decently to those who have ties or connections with one,an acceptable moral level can be attained.Henry,as he settles down at the end of the novel,knows that 'as a spiritual being' he is 'done for'(p 326),but that is not to retreat into the cave of the ego.He has seen correctly that the stripped spiritual life is not for him,that he is defined by his world,and that he must live with it.He has also seen what the world is like,and he has frankly accepted that he cannot make it a better place. After going to see Cato and hearing him say that there is no such thing as morality,Henry goes to the National Gallery.The picture that he sees there is much bleaker than those seen by Dora Greenfield in The Bell.Henry sits in front of Titian's Diana and Actaeon:

> He stared at the pictuer and his heart became quiet.How different it is,violence in art,from the horror of the real thing.The dogs are tearing out Actaeon's entrails while the indifferent goddess passes.Something frightful and beastly and terrible has been turned into one of the most beautiful things in the world.How is this possible? Is it a lie,or what? Did Titian know that human life was awful,awful,that it was nothing but a slaughterhouse? Did Max know,when he painted witty cleverly composed scenes of torture? Maybe they knew,thought Henry,but I certainly don't and I don't want to.(p 296)

Whereas the paintings seen by Dora tell her that there is something in the world which is not merely selfish,something which has calm authority and goodness,[8] what Henry sees is that the only certainties in human life are chance and mortality.When he states that he does not want to know what Cato,having killed a man,knows,he shows his acceptance of his own moral level.Henry is neither artist nor saint,although he shows every sign of being a decent materialist.

NOTES

1. Iris Murdoch, Henry and Cato (London, 1976) p 4.

2. See Lorna Sage 'The Pursuit of Imperfection' p 62.

3. Lorna Sage ('The Pursuit of Imperfection', p 61) makes the following comment:
'The opening 20-odd pages are liberally dotted with formulae like 'lost Henry', 'refugee Henry', 'tactless Henry''.
She sees these as signs of haste and of writing by formula. However, it is worth bearing in mind that Iris Murdoch read Greats at Oxford, and that she has claimed Homer as an influence (see 'Speaking of Writing', The Times 13 February 1964, p 15(b)). In the opening Book of The Odessey one can find similar examples of 'writing by formula':
'shrewd Odysseus', 'staunch Odysseus' (p 3):'thoughtful Telemachus' (pp 6 (twice), 8, 9, 10, 11). The Homeric parallel supports the assertion here that Henry is being seen as consciously seeking a 'heroic' role.

4. This aspect of the novel is excellently dealt with by Elizabeth Dipple. (See Work for the Spirit pp 22 -27)

5. See The Fire and the Sun p 46.

6. Work for the Spirit p 256.

7. See Nuns and Soldiers pp 288-294. See also p 222 above.

8. See The Bell pp 191-192 and above pp76-77.

CHAPTER NINETEEN:THE SEA,THE SEA

The world of Henry and Cato,which ends with the calm acceptance of an ordered ,inherited landscape,is in strong contrast to that of The Sea, The Sea(1978) which returns to the harsh forbidding landscape of The Unicorn.Whereas Laxlinden Hall is characterized by things,Shruff End is characterized by emptiness.The house itself stands in isolation at the end of a headland,cut off from the coast road by a rocky causeway.Its most striking features are its two empty windowless 'inner' rooms.[1] Charles Arrowby delights in this isolation at the beginning of the novel, seeing it as a space into which he can withdraw for contemplation after a life of drama (he has been a theatre director).But by the end,he has left Shruff End,unable to withdraw from the world.

One of the most immediately noticeable features of The Sea,The Sea is Charles's search for the form of his narrative.The book consists of three sections:'Prehistory','History' and 'Postscipt:Life goes on'.In the first of these Charles openly ponders the form of his memoir.

> Of course there is no need to separate 'memoir' from 'diary' or 'philosophical journal'.I can tell you,reader,about my past life and about my 'world view' also,as I ramble along.Why not? It can all come out quite naturally as I reflect.Thus unanxiously (for am I not now leaving anxiety behind?) I shall discover my 'literary form'.(p 2)

But the opening of the memoir is disrupted by the appearance of the sea-monster,although Charles cannot bring himself to tell about it until some time after it has occured.And as the narrative develops,so Charles's literary ambitions grow.No longer content with memoir or diary he turns to the novel:

> If one had time to write the whole of one's life thus bit by bit as a novel how rewarding this would be.(p 99)

And later still he thinks 'I am writing my life,after all,as a novel.'(p 153) But Charles's novel is not the selfless work that Iris Murdoch believes

the novel proper to be;it is the work of the most immense ego.

But if Charles is not a true novelist because he lacks openness to experience and to people outside himself,he remains a theatre director and brings the drama of his own life to Shruff End.The theatre,he remarks

> is like life,and it is like life even though it is the most vulgar and outrageously factitious of all the arts.Even a middling novelist can tell quite a lot of truth.His humble medium is on the side of truth.Whereas the theatre,even at its most 'realistic',is connected with the level at which,and the methods by which,we tell our everyday lies.(p 33)

As a novelist Charles tells the truth despite himself,although the reader needs to work hard at times to distinguish what is,from his account of what is,but in his role of theatre director Charles reveals himself quite openly:

> If absolute power corrupts absolutely then I must be the most corrupt of men.A theatre director is a dictator.(p 37)

This view is endorsed by every other character from Charles's past.His own comfortable image of himself as a benign Prospero who has come to Shruff End to renounce magic and to 'burn his book' is subverted by those who come from his theatrical past and tell us that he is a sorcerer who has lost his power.As Peregrine puts it after he has exorcised Charles by pushing him into the sea:

> "I can't think why I let you haunt me all those years,I suppose it was just your power and the endless spectacle of you doing well and flourishing like the green bay tree.Now you're old and done for, you'll wither away like Prospero did when he went back to Milan, you'll get pathetic and senile,and kind girls like Lizzie will visit you to cheer you up."(p 399)

Charles's moral character is shown up not only by his inflated image of himself as Prospero,but by his carefully recorded fanaticism about food. He is,of course,an 'eater' in a moral sense,having devoured the women in his life with an extraordinary rapacity.But he also reveals,in his bullying

insistence on how food should be prepared,the same dictatorial manner to the reader of his memoir as he has done to the actors and actresses who have worked with him in the past.[2]His relationships with women are a perfect expression of his egotism and drive for power.His ex-lover Rosina tells him,

> "You are a cold child.You want women but you are never <u>interested</u> in the people you want,so you learn nothing . . . you are fundamentally vicious,but somehow immature."(p 108)

He has taken Rosina from her husband,Peregrine,as an extension of his old desire to grab and to hold,a desire that seems to be rooted in his childhood and his jealousy of his effortlessly successful cousin,James, and in his failure to hold onto his adolescent love,Hartley.

The bulk of the novel is taken up with Charles's attempt to bring back to life that young love after he discovers that Hartley,now Mary Fitch,is living in the village of Narrowdean nearby.As is the case with Hilary Burde,Charles will not let go of the past.He insists that nothing has changed depite the intervention of forty years and the comments of all who surround him.Like Hilary he forces his own view on a reluctant world,and takes Hartley prisoner in an attempt to make her share his view,much as Hilary forces Crystal to share his humiliations.Charles believes that for all the other love affairs in his life,the only real one was his early love for Hartley.He puts it thus:

> Since I started writing this 'book' or whatever it is I have felt as if I were walking about in a dark cavern where there were various 'lights',made perhaps by shafts or apertures which reach the outside world.(What a gloomy image of my mind,but I do not mean it in a gloomy sense.) There is among those lights one great light towards which I have been half consciously wending my way.It may be a great 'mouth' opening to the daylight,or it may be a hole through which fires emerge from the centre of the earth.And am I still unsure which it is,and must I now approach in order to find out? This image has come to me so suddenly,I am not sure what to make of it.(p 77)

The explicit use which Charles makes here of Plato's cave touches again the key-note of Iris Murdoch's ethical interests.The way forward lies through love,but love,and most of all being in love,is such an ambiguous matter, so likely to become corrupted by the activities of the ego.In the case of Charles's particular image there are alternative sources of light which may come from the centre of the earth.This suggests that,at least here, there is an equation between the fire kindled by the ego and the fires of damnation.Charles,however,does not see this possibility but is confident that his love for Hartley is the real thing:

> I must try to describe Hartley.Oh,my darling,how clearly I can see you now.Surely this is perception,not imagination.The light in the cavern is daylight,not fire.(p 79)

But how wrong he is in that assessment,'Time will show',to use one of his own most repeated phrases,for what he tries to do in the major part of the novel is to ignore the processess of time and to forget that his love for Hartley is part of his childhood.His efforts to live through the experience again serve only to bring misery to Hartley and a very slow realization to himself as he dimly begins to see that he is not going to persuade her to leave her husband.At times he seems to almost be aware of what he is doing both to her and to himself,as when he comments,

> What was I doing,or rather,what was happening to me? . . . I had lost control of my life and of the lives with which I was meddling . . .I had awakened some dreadful sleeping demon,set going some dreadful machine;and what would be would be.(p 310)

But the demon that has been awakened is his ego,which as usual in Iris Murdoch's novels does work on mechanical lines;once started it takes extraordinary efforts to stop its progress.The pressure of the past,the long chain of acts and consequences,makes it hard to say what exactly sets it in motion again,but the sequence of events has a logic of its own whose demands grow more rapacious.Titus,the Fitch's adopted son,dies as a consequence of Charles's ego;Charles sees Ben Fitch as a murderer, Hartley as persecuted by him:himself as the saviour of both Titus and his

mother.

Throughout the complex working out of Charles's fantasy he is seen as a slave to an attachment or craving,unable to break free from a past life.A concept which describes Charles's situation is provided by his cousin James,who is a Buddhist.He tells Charles about bardo.

> "Some Tibetans believed that the souls of the dead,while waiting to be reborn,wander in a sort of limbo,not unlike the Homeric Hades, They called it bardo.It can be rather unpleasant.You meet all kinds of demons there."
>
> "So it's a place of punishment?"
>
> "Yes,but a just automatic sort of punishment.The learned ones regard these figures as subjective visions,which depend on the sort of life the dead man has led." (p 384)

Charles has said early in the novel that in his youth he could never tell if either he or James inhabited the real world.In the light of James's description of bardo,which so aptly sums up Charles's life at Shruff End where he meets demons he himself has let loose in the past,and of Gilbert Opian's remark that Charles is 'king of shadows'(p 93),and the numerous references to demons throughout the novel,[3] in seems clear that Iris Murdoch intends Charles to be seen inhabiting a kind of bardo.In that case,if Charles is not in the real world,then James must be.

However,it is not quite as simple as that.James's presence in the novel introduces a dimension to reality which is far beyond the limits of Charles's obsessed consciousness.And although we are told that James is a Buddhist, and although that introduces a concept like bardo to describe Charles's position,James's contribution to the novel is largely not esoteric or mystical in a conventional sense.His comments about Charles's activities at Shruff End are eminently common-sensical rather than other worldly (see p 175);he does not overtly condemn Charles's behaviour,but expresses doubt.In his calm pursuit of reason he sounds rather like Socrates.When he arrives at Shruff End to become an actor in the drama there he can offer Charles sound advice:

"But should you not criticize this guiding idea? I won't call it a fiction.Let us call it a dream.Of course we all live in dreams and by dreams,and even in a disciplined spiritual life,in some ways especially there,it is hard to distinguish dream from reality. In ordinary human affairs humble common sense comes to one's aid. For most people common sense is moral sense.But you seem to have deliberately excluded this modest source of light.Ask yourself, what really happened between whom all those years ago? You've made a story of it,and stories are false." (p 335)

James is doing two things here.Firstly,he is insisting on the continual demands made by the ego on one's efforts to see clearly.Secondly,he is suggesting that Charles has mistaken his 'moral level',to use Henry Marshalson's phrase,[4] and has been thinking of himself as a more significant being than he really is.He has not made a life-long impact on Hartley, much though his ego would like to think so.James,apparently so blameless in this field,is an expert on the subject because he too has made the same mistake.He is a highly developed Buddhist who has learnt the 'tricks people can learn,almost anybody can learn them if they're well taught and they try hard enough'(p 446).He tells Charles how he failed to keep his Tibetan servant alive,although he believed that he could raise his body temperature sufficiently to preserve the two of them in the snow.[5] This flaw,this act of vanity is why James,although an accomplished spiritual adept,fails to achieve Nirvana.

And like Charles,James repeats his fault.Having somehow sent Titus to Charles he loses his grip on him,and Titus dies in the sea.James's spiritual powers can be brought into play to save Charles from Minn's Cauldron,but the effort required means that he cannot help Titus.Again, his vanity in saving Charles produces disaster,for Titus,as Charles comes to see,is

> somehow the point,the pure gift,that which the gods had really sent me,along with so much irrelevant packaging.(p 458)

Titus is important because he arrives untainted by Charles's past,the

only character in the novel with whom Charles has the opportunity to build a relationship uncorrupted by the past.But Titus dies because Charles,in his vanity,does not tell him how difficult.it can be to get out of the sea.

At their very different levels both James and Charles fail to turn magic into spirit.James's failure is significant because it makes much clearer what Iris Murdoch does not mean by her use of the term 'mystical'. [6] James is not a saint,although he comes near it,and his spiritual awareness is flawed by egotism.But the 'tricks' that he describes and uses are not mystical.What is mystical is the awareness of one's insignificance and of the glory of the universe that Charles briefly has two visions of. The first,when he wakes at night while sleeping in the open,occurs in the midst of his pursuit of Hartley(p 146).He wakes to feel that he has heard the music of the spheres and that he understands his insignificance.But in the morning the old unregenerate ego asserts itself again.This suggests that moral reality is available if only the defences of the ego are down.The second vision concludes the major part of the book,'History'.As Charles ponders James and the 'mysticism that had gone wrong,a spirituality which had somehow degenerated into magic'(p 474),he sees 'into the vast soft interior of the universe which was slowly and gently turning itself inside out'(p 475).When he wakes in the morning it is to see the seals which have so long avoided him:

> And as I watched their play I could not doubt that they were beneficent beings come to visit me and bless me.(p 476)

But as the 'Postscript''makes clear such visions are moments when the ego's defence drops.The 'Postscript' has an alarming alternation between the old power-crazed monster and a calmer more perceptive Charles. He is able to see through his delusion about Hartley and to be more just to Lizzie,but his attitude to James still shows his old jealousy. But he has improved,and his final comments show an awareness that the good is not merely difficult to achieve,but impossible.

> What an egoist I must seem in the preceeding pages.But am I so exceptional? We must live by the light of our own self-satisfaction,

through that secret vital busy inwardness which is even more remarkable than our reason.Thus we must live unless we are saints, and are there any? There are spiritual beings,perhaps James was one, but there are no saints.(p 482)

NOTES

1. Iris Murdoch, The Sea, The Sea (London, 1978) p 14.

2. Elizabeth Dipple (Work for the Spirit p 304) notes that Charles's obsession with food anchors the novel 'to a heartily real world, a handy thing to have in this book where the sense of the supernatural presents such a severe counterbalance.'
   This suggests that a reader is exceptionally aware of the presence of the supernatural in the novel, but that is not so. Indeed, the rationalist explanations of the supernatural happenings, although they do not 'explain away' these events, nonetheless provide a framework of explanation within which the supernatural is felt to be extraordinary.

3. For example at pp 107, 172, 310, 471, 501.

4. Henry and Cato p 321. Also see above pp 204-205.

5. James says that his servant, the sherpa, was called Milarepa, and that "I called him that after a - a poet I rather admire." (p 446) James's hesitancy suggests that he is evading the issue in some way. Milarepa is the name of an eleventh-century Tibetan mystic, who was a great sinner but became a great saint. His development shows the way from an avenging black magician to a supremely powerful yogi. (See The Life of Milarepa, A New Translation by Lobshang P. Lhalungpa (St Albans and London, 1979).

6. See 'Existentialists and Mystics' and also p 162 above.

CHAPTER TWENTY:NUNS AND SOLDIERS

The opposed categories of the title suggest an opposition between the spiritual and the worldly which is not a completely accurate picture ot the novel's structure.There are other ways in which the four main characters could be grouped.Tim and Gertrude marry and are happy:Anne and the Count do not and are not.Or perhaps,Tim,Gertrude and the Count form a social unit from which Anne is excluded.The point here is that Nuns and Soldiers (1980) is rather open in the way it regards its characters. Much depends on the 'moral level' at which they are operating,[1] and it is this which divides nun from nun and soldier from soldier rather more than simply opposing the two categories.

The end of The Sea,The Sea is entitled 'Postscript:Life goes on',and Nuns and Soldiers is much concerned with how life goes on after major changes in a life.The novel opens with the death of Guy Openshaw and the arrival of Anne Cavidge from the convent.In earlier novels (most notably Bruno's Dream) death has been an endpoint,a way of seeing that love means the negation of the individual.But in this novel,although Guy may achieve that vision,the interest is in how Gertrude,his widow,lives on.She is plunged into the blackest despair by his death,from which she pulls herself by somewhat rapaciously needing other people.She wants Anne to stay with her 'forever'[2] after Guy has died,and even later when she has married Tim she still wants to maintain her court and have the Count and Anne in attendance on her.But although Gertrude's activity in keeping her circle together can rightly be viewed as the activity of the ego,it is necessary for her to survive and provide a place for others too.In Gertrude the activity of the ego,creating a place where she is needed and loved and in which she can hold others,does not lead to her destruction as a moral agent.If she cannot manage the highest level of selfless love,then she can achieve one of the lesser moral goals than perfection.In her case that lesser goal is to avoid despair.Throughout Nuns and Soldiers there is emphasis on such lesser goals.Innocence,honour,helping one or two

people who happen to be nearby are some of these lesser goals.They are more human in their scale than the saintly goal of perfection which is as dark and solitary as is the death of Guy Openshaw.It is Guy,in one of his few lucid moments,who articulates this theme.He says to Anne as he waits for death:

> "We are selectively decent,if we are decent at all.We each have one or two virtues which we cultivate,not much really.Or we pick a virtue which always seems to help,to mediate goodness somehow, as it might be resolution,or benevolence,or innocence,or temperance, or honour.Something not too large,not too impossibly hard that seems to suit us somehow -" (p 68)

The privacy of death and the impossibility of perfection open the way for a novel which deals with how people survive in an imperfect world. The greatest of the survivors is Gertrude.In the course of the year which the novel spans,she remarries and establishes for herself something of the old order of things.She reflects on this,thinking

> isn't it strange,all those years I deeply and faithfully loved Guy, and now I deeply and faithfully love Tim,who could not be more different.I shall become,well I shall partly become,a different person.But that is a movement of life that I can't and won't deny. It is so,like the stones and the leaves.(p 440)

Gertrude's attitude to the past is completely different from the egocentric monsters of A Word Child and The Sea,The Sea.She is prepared to let it go, not to forget it,but to free it from her self.And she is consequently open to the future.Her association of that openness with natural things marks this as a moral movement because it responds to reality.

Of course,Gertrude is 'voracious',as Elizabeth Dipple describes her,[3] but she performs a moral function within her world despite that.She knows that her 'moral level' is to seek happiness,and in pursuing this for herself she provides places for others.The Count,reduced to despair by his love for Gertrude and her preference for the less respectable

Tim Reede,is offered 'truth and love'(p 455) as a basis for their relationship rather than the love of marriage.The Count accepts this, and at the party which follows is seen to be radiantly happy.Tim Reede, too,finds that Gertrude gives his life shape.When she suggests marriage a profound change takes place in Tim:

> There was something quite new in his mind and his heart,something which co-existed with his delights and his anxieties and his mechanical evasions and habitual lies.This new thing might be described as a kind of moral hope,a hope which,when he felt pain, caused him the deepest pain.Or was it simply the desire for security, a desire for a house and a home,a desire for a mother? Tim was a child and children want order.No,it was more than that.The desire which he now felt,and which he had never felt so clearly before, was for a life of simplicity,an open honourable life where the expression of love was natural and truthful and direct and easy: as somehow in his own experience it had never been.(p 203)

The clustering of secondary moral terms here places Gertrude's influence most precisely.That is affirmed when Tim reflects,after their marriage, that he 'had perceived her virtue and rested upon it.She had rescued him from his demons and restored his innocence'(p 285).

Gertrude's achievements in the novel are,however,subjected to the criticism of Anne Cavidge.She sees that Gertrude is an egoist,but is unwilling to be charitable about this.She thinks that the Count has been 'magicked into happiness'(p 460) by Gertrude and at the very beginning of the novel,when Anne accompanies Gertrude to Cumbria in the aftermath of Guy's death,Anne separates herself from Gertrude in terms of 'moral level'.When Gertrude says to her,

> "Damn giving up the world.Guy wanted me to be happy."
>
> "He was right,it is for you." But not for me,thought Anne.
>
> Happiness has no part in what drove me out and must drive me on. (pp 106-107)

Anne's reply is part of her censoriousness about the world.She does think

that she is superior to the rest of them,and that her personal quest is a moral task of greater significance than Gertrude's search for happiness.

Anne has left the convent because she wants to make a new faith in the world,having lost her faith in God and the hereafter.However,she will carry 'her Christ,the only one that was really hers'(p 62) with her. As soon as she leaves the convent she is plunged into a world of violent emotions.She has to help Gertrude through her grief for Guy,and is then confronted by her mixed feelings about Gertrude's relationship with Tim Reede.This is all compounded when she finds herself in love with the Count. She finds that she is

> back in the hell of the personal,the very place I ran away from to God,back in the rotten criminal mess I got myself out of when I thought I would seek and find innocence and stay with it forever. (p 302)

But the 'hell of the personal' is the only place that a new faith can be found,and Anne's censoriousness and superiority,her refusal to allow herself to become involved in it almost prevent the forming of that faith.

During her stay in Cumbria with Gertrude,Anne plunges into the cold sea and nearly drowns,She is saved by Gertrude.It is clear that she swims out of vanity,just as she climbed a cliff the day before 'to impress Gertrude'(p 110).In view of the consistent use in Iris Murdoch's novels of the sea as an image of the moral world in which the individual must lose the self,Anne's inability to survive suggests an inability to let go of her spiritual self-esteem.In the sea she finds herself 'the helpless plaything of great mechanical forces'(p 111),another consistent image of the ego.

Anne's ego manifests itself not only in her sense of superiority, but in her tendency to judge.She is noted as judging by Gertrude at the start of their relationship (p 106),but the most destructive and uncharitable judgement that she makes is when she thinks that Tim and Daisy are exploiting Gertrude for money.It is because she believes that the world is generally corrupt that she can make such a judgement,and her pleasure in this comes

from her sense of spiritual superiority.

Anne's censoriousness stems from an inability to see the unity of the moral world,that Gertrude's pursuit of happiness and her own search for innocence or goodness are one.She believes that the world somehow works against the growth of the spirit,but the central event of her spiritual quest,her meeting with,or vision of,Christ shows that it is otherwise. Anne's Christ is not an all-powerful divinity;he will not,or cannot work miracles.What he tells her is that she must do it all herself if she wishes to be saved:

> "I am not a magician,I never was.You know what to do.Do right, refrain from wrong."(p 292)

And in an allusion to Dame Julian of Norwich's vision of Christ in the Revelation of Divine Love he asks Anne what he has in his hand.[4]

> She thought,then said with confidence,"A hazel nut,Sir."
>
> "No." He opened his hand and put something down on the table. Anne saw that it was an elliptical grey stone,a little chipped at the end.It was,or was very like,one of the seaside stones which had so much appalled her upon the beach in Cumbria.She had brought one or two back with her as souvenirs,but she could not make out whether this stone was one of the ones she had brought or not.
>
> Still holding hard to the edge of the table,Anne stared at the stone.Then she said slowly,"Is it so small?"
>
> "Yes,Anne."
>
> "Everything that is,so little -" (p 292)

What Christ tells Anne is that salvation is achieved through love,and through accepting the smallness of the universe and the insignificance of the individual .His down to earth appearance and his simple utterance stress that salvation,the achieving of the good,do not occur elsewhere. There is only the here and now,and one must attend to the moral tasks of the quotidian world.Anne has been appalled by the stones on the Cumbrian beech because they are all the same,there is no distinction between them, just as there is no distinction between her and Gertrude in human terms.

That Anne,despite her spiritual superiority,may be able to come to accept this is hinted at by her enthusiasm for the novels which she reads with Gertrude.By the same token,her astonishment at them is an indication of how removed from life she has been.She finds Little Dorrit

> amazing,it was so crammed and chaotic,and yet so touching,a kind of miracle,a strangely naked display of feeling,and full of profound ideas,yet one felt it was all true! (p 54)

As a result of her vision of Christ Anne becomes less censorious.She accepts Tim as Gertrude's husband,although she will not abandon her self completely, for she will not stay to be part of Gertrude's charmed circle,prevented, as she puts it herself,by her 'unbroken pride'(p 494).She leaves,at the end of the novel,for America,preceeded by Daisy who,she learns,is also seeking her innocence.Anne reflects that 'It was a quest more suited to human powers.Perhaps after all,Goodness was too hard to seek and too hard to understand'.(pp 503-504) This humility and charity is new to Anne.Her willingness to forgive the gossipers in The Prince of Denmark,the pub where she has gone to find Daisy,opens the way for a vision of the night sky and the snowflakes which recalls Charles Arrowby's visions of the universe turning itself inside out in The Sea,The Sea.[5]

> The big flakes came into view,moving,weaving,crowding,descending slowly in a great hypnotic silence which seemed to separate itself from the sounds of the street below.Anne stopped and watched it. It reminded her of something,which perhaps she had seen in a picture or a dream.It looked like the heavens spread out in glory,totally unrolled before the face of God,countless,limitless,eternally beautiful,the universe in majesty proclaiming the presence and the goodness of its Creator.(pp 504-505)

But if Anne discovers this openness to the world only at the end of the novel and has to go to the New World to pursue innocence,choosing the lesser task rather than the greater task of goodness,there is another character who displays the same quality.Tim Reede is not a heroic figure, certainly not Prince Hamlet.but an attendant lord.He attends The Prince of

Denmark pretty regularly in his life with Daisy.He has many common human weaknesses;he is a casual liar,feckless,mechanical in many responses.But although he has made no effort to become more than a mediocre painter,he

> possessed by nature a gift yearned for by sages,he was able simply to <u>perceive</u>! (He did not realize that this was exceptional, he thought everybody could do it.) (pp 124-125)

Unlike Anne,Tim does not think that he has superior talent but he has yet to bring his ability into any kind of focus.He believes in his work that

> he was not creating the world,he was discovering it,not even that, he was just seeing it and letting it continue to manifest itself.(p 126)

His openness to nature,which is particularly manifest in his response to the landscape of southern France,needs to be matched by a moral openness which he finds in Gertrude.And even when he has apparently lost Gertrude he responds to the need to free himself from his mechanical dependence on Daisy,to whom he has returned simply because it is the known,familiar way.His courage in finally leaving Daisy,which is ultimately for the benefit of them both,is seen as considerable,for it is easy to speak of rejecting the mechanical in one's life although Tim's case shows how hard it can be to do.But that rejection leads him to find the value in regular work,in order and the effort to improve his art.

Tim Reede and Gertrude are both mediocre figures in the moral sense; they do not scale the heights of perfection.Indeed,Christ tells Anne that it is 'impossible'(p 293) for her to be made good,although it is not clear whether he has in mind her own faults or the general human condition. But they do pursue their specialized secondary virtues;Tim perceives the world about him and Gertrude achieves happiness and a sense of being loved. Even Anne Cavidge accepts that she must seek for a lesser virtue than goodness.

The point of <u>Nuns and Soldiers</u> seems clear:there is no God,and the Christ of traditional religious teaching somehow misses the point;there is only the here and now,and helping the one or two people who one comes across;the natural world is that which points the moral lessons of man's

insignificance but also of its sublime beauty.What matters is to accept, lovingly and with attention,'everything that is'(p 292),including the mechanical activities of men's egos and the place in which one finds oneself.

NOTES

1.See Henry and Cato p 321,and pp 204-205 above.

2.Iris Murdoch,Nuns and Soldiers (London,1980) p 102.

3.Work for the Spirit p 312.

4.See A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich,edited by Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J.,Part Two,(Toronto,1978), p 299:

'And in this he shewed a little thing,the quantitie of an haselnott, lying in ye palme of my hand,as me semide,and it was a round as a balle. I looked theran with the eye of my vnderstanding,and thought:what may this be? And it was answered generally thus:/ it is all that is made. I marvayled how it mighte last,for me thought it might sodenly have fallen to nawght for littlenes.And I was answered in my vnderstanding: it lasteth and ever shall,for god loueth it;and so hath all thing being by the loue of god.'

5.The Sea,The Sea p 475.Cited above p 56.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE PHILOSOPHER'S PUPIL

The appearance of The Philosopher's Pupil (1983) was preceeded by the appearance of an interview with Iris Murdoch conducted by John Haffenden.[1] It displays the same kind of undogmatic modesty about her work which the much earlier interview by Frank Kermode also showed[2]. As she did in that interview, so here too she seems to play down some of the aspects of the novel which readers feel to be important. The critics have claimed that it is significant that a philosopher is at the centre of the novel, but Iris Murdoch seems unwilling to concede so much.[3] Haffenden raises the issue thus:

> It's the first novel in which you've placed a philosopher at the centre, almost as if you are outfacing critics who have labelled you a philosophical novelist.

IM: The novel has more to do with a pupil-teacher relationship, which I've been involved in all my life - in both roles. I think it's interesting and moving, and I made the character a philosopher because it came along with the package, as it were. I am writing philosophy at the moment, but of course in The Philosopher's Pupil the character talks philosophy en passant rather than as part of the story.

JH: And yet the character, John Robert Rozanov, has covered something of the same ground as your own work in philosophy, including Platonism . .

IM: In a rough way, yes, but that's not particularly significant.[4]

This will not do. It is quite clearly of central importance that Rozanov is a philosopher, and that his philosophy exhibits considerable similarity to his creator's. It is significant because philosophy seems to lead Rozanov to despair, which Iris Murdoch claims it can do to some people[5], and also because his philosophical knowledge cannot prevent him from behaving in

a monstrous fashion.These are aspects of the novel which demand attention, particularly when they can be seen,not as startling changes in direction, but as the result of a slowly evolving ethical point of view.

The Philosopher's Pupil is a very long novel,which is a reflection of Iris Murdoch's wish to get a lot of people in.This she sees as a virtue in that it enables her to escape from her own mythology.[6]The effect of this is not really to create a closely realized society but to register the fact that the dramas of the McCaffrey family take place against the background of a world which can continue without them.It is almost as if the large cast suggests by its presence that any of them could be the foreground and the McCaffreys the background.Indeed,at brief moments the background does move forward and assert its claim to significance,as at moments such as William Eastcote's death,or the running away with another student of Emma's singing teacher,Mr Hanway.[7]Such moments of arbitrariness,when the reader's sense of the balance of the plot is upset,are matched by events within the McCaffrey world,though not contained by it,such as when a fox sits in the front seat of the Rolls-Royce,or the Osmores return from America (p 423 & p 515).The world of Ennistone is conjured up through the spa,the Institute and its various swimming pools,in a way which is consistent with Iris Murdoch's previous use of images of water to indicate the loss of the self and the moral life,and also the sheer multiplicity of life.

> Swimming is the very best kind of exercise for old and young,and is undoubtedly also good for the soul.This lofty conception of the spiritual utility of swimming battles continuously with the (also recurrent) notion of many citizens that the Baths is a temple of hedonism.(p 24)

It is a world much concerned with love in its many manifestations.The sexual thrill (p 23) which women feel on entering the Ennistone Rooms,and which is also felt by Tom (p 519);the awareness of others' sexual presence which pains a number of minor characters;Rozanov's passion for Hattie;Father Bernard Jacoby's chaste homosexuality:the production of the opera The

Triumph of Aphrodite;these and numerous other instances suggest the variety of possible aspects of love.

Against this background the drama of the McCaffrey family and its relationships with Rozanov occur.The McCaffreys are a family of egotists for the most part,although the variety of their egotism is itself of interest. Alex,the mother,believes that Rozanov is returning to Ennistone for her(p 61); Brian's selfishness prevents him from achieving the Good Life (p 54);Stella, George's wife,believes that only she can save him,and uses her love as a form of power.But their egos look insignificant beside that of George:

> George,more than most people,lived by an idea of himself which was in some ways significantly at odds with reality.To say he was a narcissist was to say little.We are mostly narcissists . . . George was an accomplished narcissist,an expert and dedicated liver of the double life,and this in a way which was not always to his discredit. That is,he was in some respects,though not in others,not as bad as he pretended to be,or as he really believed himself to be.Herein he practised that sort of protective coloration which consists in sincerely (or 'sincerely',sincerity being an ambiguous concept) giving one's faults pejorative names which conceal the yet more awful nature of what is named.All of which goes to show that it is difficult to analyse human frailty and certainly difficult to analyse George's.(p 73)

George is untypical only in the extremity of his behaviour,and perhaps in his self-conscious efforts to maintain his evil reputation.When he is caught with his guard down he behaves well,as when he rescues the dog,Zed,from the sea (p358).There is here no sign of the demonic aspect of George until he gets ashore and is confronted by people whom he knows.The excesses which he indulges in encourage others to try to ' explain' him,and George,too, shares in this activity as if to produce a theory about someone was automatically to make them more interesting.

Alex said (and half believed) that George simply drank too much.

Others said it was because of Rufus,some blamed Stella,some Alex, some Alan.Yet other theories saw George as a repressed homosexual,or an Oedipus victim,or a one-man protest against the bourgeoisie.He figured indeed upon many flags which were flown.And although George never systematically took up the game of explaining himself,he dabbled in it to the extent of tinting his excesses here and there with ameliorating hints of a more interesting ethical background.He felt,

> or affected to feel,that his chaotic and unbridled personality was in some important sense more real than the decorous natures that surrounded him.(pp 74-75)

The desire to explain human behaviour by reference to some theory or pattern is mocked throughout the novel by the sheer variety of what happens.There is so much that is so random that it defies any kind of explanation which seeks to impose a pattern on experience.The only patterning which is allowed is the jokey tying up of loose ends which the narrator offers as the novel moves towards its conclusion (p 533).And even here there is the sense that if a parodic explanation needs to involve such enormous detail for such a trivial event,then the amount of detail required to explain something as complex as a character will be beyond any possibility of expression.

But in any event it is not the causes of George's behaviour which are of interest but the actions themselves and the principles which he believes them to embody.George believes that both he and Rozanov are somehow 'outside the power of censure' (p 416),and that belief somehow intimidates others from censuring him.It is only at the so-called Slipper House Riot that George gets the treatment which he often deserves,and is defeated by ridicule.As Tom reflects at this time (p 412) this suggests that people have taken George's demonic self too seriously and have failed to see that it is an aspect of his own vanity.

At the opposite extreme to George's vanity and self-obsession lies the innocence of his youngest brother,Tom.Tom can let the world exist around him without trying to appropriate it.When he discovers his friend Emma's

extraordinary voice,he can resist the egoistical desire to take it over and can

> unite himself with another in joint proprietorship of the world: a movement of salvation which for him was easy,for others (George, for instance) very hard.(p 121)

Interestingly enough,Tom's existence is presented as being the product of chance and mortality (the twin facts which dominate our existence,according to Iris Murdoch),in that his parents have both died ,and their meeting as soon as 'Feckless Fiona' arrived in Ennistone and her almost immediate conception of Tom is seen by Tom himself as 'the absolute chance that had initiated his existence'(p 116).Since Tom has been brought into being by,or at least brought up as a result of,these two fundamentals of moral awareness it is not surprising that he has a almost natural ability to act with due regard for others.

Tom is not an explainer;he is significantly not one of the great intellects of the novel,although he is intelligent enough.He acts decently with regard to what is there and with a delight in the existence of others.He does not, unlike the rest of his family,think that he is the centre of the universe. Nor,despite the interest surrounding his birth,does he have any desire to probe his own psyche and, backgound.

> Tom did not reflect upon the dynamics of these various relationships which would have been (and indeed were) of such interest to (for instance) Ivor Sefton.He loved Alex,Ruby,Brian and George thoughtlessly and in differing ways which he apprehended but did not analyse.(p 118)

Ivor Sefton is the resident psychiatrist in Ennistone,and it is no surprise to find the attitude of earlier novels continued with regard to psychoanalysis. What is more surprising is that the analytical work of the philosopher should also fail to release him from the toils of the ego.It is no accident that Hattie,the other innocent of the novel,and the philosopher's grand-daughter,should display,like Tom,no analytical talent.In this novel the ability to engage in complex intellectual manoeuvres seems to preclude the

ability to act morally.It is as if the intellectual acumen becomes a form of power which leads to a despising of anyone who cannot perform the same tricks.In The Philosopher's Pupil moral activity takes place either without any cogitation,or in moments of silence,such as the Quaker meeting (p 204), out of which comes William Eastcote's praise of innocnce.Indeed,innocence, which is seen as a curiously non-intellectual state,seems to encourage valid moral judgement.Tom,rather than any of the rest of his family,is able to judge Rozanov correctly (p 424),and Hattie is able to see,and to come to terms with,the awfulness of her grand-father being 'in love' with her (pp 535-544).What William Eastcote says at the Quaker meeting is reflected by the way in which both Tom and Hattie act:

> "Let us prize innocence.The child is innocent,the man is not.Let us prolong and cherish the innocence of childhood,as we find it in the child and as we rediscover it later within ourselves.Repentance, renewal of life,such as is the task and possibility of every man,is the recovery of innocence.Let us see it thus,a return to a certain simplicity,something which is not hard to understand,not a remote good but very near."(p 204)

William Eastcote (Bill the Lizard as he is unaccountably known) carries great weight in the novel.He is universally recognized as a good man and mourned unequivocally by the whole town at his death.His own selflessness when faced with the knowledge of his impending death is an ideal by which the behaviour of the McCaffreys can be judged.

The relative positions occupied by George and Tom,Stella and Hattie are variations on themes well established in earlier novels.Where The Philosopher's Pupil attempts something new is in the portaryal of Rozanov and his 'moral opposite' Father Bernard Jacoby.Both of these figures relate to earlier inhabitants of Murdoch-land.In his first appearance in the novel, Rozanov remarks that he would have liked 'another talk with Hugo'(p 95). It is clear from the context that this is Hugo Belfounder (whom we are told has now died) the source of Jake Donoghue's philosophical dialogue The

Silencer in Under the Net.[8] As Hugo is interested in the particularity of experience,so Rozanov's philosophical career includes the seminal work Nostalgia for the Particular (p 78).It is,of course,also true that Iris Murdoch wrote an article of that title,her first formal philosophical article to be published[9],and Rozanov's subsequent career,his interest in moral philosophy developing throungh an interest in Kant and leading on to Plato, parallels Iris Murdoch's own.

Rozanov does not make many explicit philosophical statements in the novel, although his views emerge as he questions Father Bernard about his views (pp 185-198).But it is Rozanov's final attitude towards philosophy which is of real significance in the novel,and the effect that his philosophical interest in the Good has on his actions.Tom,the innocent,acts without analysis, and acts well.Rozanov.for all his intellectual powers,does not.As Iris Murdoch points out in her interview with John Haffenden:

> John Robert is a power figure,he can't help exercising power.I don't think too much weight should be put on the notion that the book is about the nature of philosophy;it's about the nature of power in human relations.The teacher is a powerful and potentially disruptive figure.[10]

It seems a little strange to say that the novel is not about 'the nature of philosophy' when the central character is a moral philosopher who is unable to act morally (justly,lovingly) because he is unable to rid himself of his own ego.Such a situation demands that one ask what is the use of philosophy if it cannot produce or encourage the behaviour which it theoretically endorses.As both Tom and Hattie perceive,Rozanov is totally bound up in himself,sensitive only to the ridicule of others.Interestingly enough,George (Rozanov's pupil in more ways than one perhaps) is also sensitive only to ridicule.It is the laughter that Tom starts which sends George home from the so-called Slipper House Riot,Rozanov dominates the consciousness of everyone he meets;his sheer physical bulk,his reputation, his disconcerting philosophical conversation,all produce a situation in

which others cannot obtain space.When he proposes that Tom marry Hattie (whom he has not yet met) Rozanov says:

> "Oftener than we think. . . we can make things be the way that we desire." (p 275)

He cannot tolerate the thought that Hattie will have a private life from which he will be ineluctably excluded.That this private life is a sexual one seems of secondary importance;Rozanov wishes simply to contain Hattie. For him,she is a thing.

So what good is philosophy,if it does not prevent Rozanov from being a monster of egoism?It does not help him cope with his obsession to possess Hattie any more than it enables him to deal justly with those whom he perceives to be his intellectual inferiors.In this respect Stella is more honest;when she realizes that George is her life's work she gives up both philosophy and Rozanov,despite the fact that she is better at philosophy than George is (p 370).Rozanov's suicide,particularly as commented upon by Father Bernard,seems to clinch the case for suggesting that the novel is concerned with the value of philosophy,despite its author's comments:

> John Robert died because he saw at last,with horrified wide-open eyes,the futility of philosophy.Metaphysics and human sciences are made impossible by the penetration of morality into the moment to moment conduct of ordinary life:the understanding of this fact is religion .(p 571)

Father Bernard Jacoby is the novel's most important explanatory figure. As Rozanov has some relation to the earlier figure of Hugo Belfounder,so Father Bernard has a relation to Carel Fisher of The Time of the Angels. In his discussion with Rozanov,Father Bernard remarks:

> "Our problem now,the problem of our age,our interregnum,out time of the angels -"
>
> "Why angels?"
>
> "Spirit without God."(p 187)

This is the same statement of the 'problem of the age' as Carel Fisher

gives in the earlier novel[11], but Father Bernard brings a very different attitude to it. What for Carel was a matter of despair gives Father Bernard a sense of the significance of the immediate world. For him, as for Carel, there is no God, although there is a Christ 'the blond beardless youth of the early Church, not the tormented crucified one of flesh and blood' (p 155). Father Bernard's sense of the significance of Christ is close to that which Anne Cavidge gains from her vision of Christ in Nuns and Soldiers[12]. For both of them Christ provides no easy answers but points out the work of goodness is to be done by the individual, and that it consists in the activity of loving the world around one. So for Father Bernard the world of the spirit is the same as the physical world which surrounds him, 'entirely the same and yet absolutely different' (p 187) as he puts it himself. Rozanov mocks such a view, believing that it is absurd to suggest that attention to the world can lead to a sense of transcendence. And yet it is Father Bernard's view which finds reflection within the novel in the behaviour of the innocent Tom and Hattie. Their sheer delight and enjoyment of the world, coupled with the survival of Father Bernard and the suicide of Rozanov, suggests that Rozanov's analytical approach misses some crucial factor.

> Father Bernard's final letter to N, the narrator, claims that he has been chosen to strive for the continuance of religion on this planet. Nothing else but true religion can save mankind from a lightless and irredeemable materialism, from a technocratic nightmare where determinism becomes true for all except an unimaginably depraved few, who are themselves the mystified slaves of a conspiracy of machines. . . What is necessary is the absolute denial of God. Even the word, the name, must go. What then remains? Everything, and Christ too, but entirely changed and broken down into the most final and absolutely naked simplicity, into atoms, into electrons, into protons. (p 570)

In terms of conventional Christianity this would be a non-religion, and indeed, in its insistence that there is no divinity or greater power in

the universe than mankind,it seems hard to describe it as religion at all. But in terms of the essay 'Existentialists and Mystics' the position is explicable.Father Bernard's conclusion to his letter reflects the central thesis of that essay,the 'untheory that human good is something which lies in the foreground of life and not in its background'.[13]He states that

> There is no beyond,there is only here,the infinitely small,infinitely great and utterly demanding present. (p 571)

Similarly,when Tom investigates the depths of the Institute to try to find the source of the hot spring,he discovers there is nothing there but pipes and ladders,amongst which he gets locked in.This incident seems to suggest two things.Firstly,that there is nothing beyond the immediate phenomena of the world,as Father Bernard claims;there is no mysterious source. Secondly,there is little value in introspection.Tom has come to the Institute needing 'to busy himself about his state of mind' (p 519), an uncharacteristic state for him to be in.His temporary imprisonment amongst the machinery of the Institute suggests his temporary obsession with the mechanism of his own mind.When he escapes,he behaves more characteristically showing a concern for Hattie rather than himself and going straight to Rozanov's to release her from her imprisonment.

These two interpretations are consistent with the general thrust of the novel,although the incident itself does not really fit particularly well into the novel's structure.The interpretations both suggest that what is of importance is 'the utterly demanding present' and that there are neither mysterious sources for things,that is,God,nor interesting insights to be gained by self-examination.It simultaneously denies the traditional religious position and what Iris Murdoch sees as the existentialist position that 'man is God'.[14]

The Philosopher's Pupil continues the development of what Iris Murdoch has called the 'mystical novel' in that it 'attempts to express a religious consciousness without the traditional trappings of religion'[15].At the same time,it seems to suggest that the analytic activities of philosophy do not provide either a satisfactory ethical response to the multifariousness

of the world.It is not quite enough to say that Rozanov can be separated from his profession,firstly,because he is so wholly identified with it,and secondly,because those who have been taught by him also seem to have learnt nothing about right conduct.

Right conduct is perhaps best exemplified by the curious narration of the novel.As has been noted earlier[16],The Philosopher's Pupil is a first-person narration which entirely lacks the usual characteristics of these novels.Indeed,the narrator,rather than being an egoist,moves to the opposite pole.He expunges his name,and calls himself N;he removes his personality from the action,while giving his attention to the activities of others(p 16); what he knows and records is presented impersonally rather than as part of his character.However,his occasional judgements and intrusions suggest that even the most self-abnegating individual will suffer moral lapses as their egos surface and trouble the still waters of detachment.In the end, perhaps,N's meditation on the events which form the novel is,like Father Bernard's meditation,impossible to distinguish from 'unregenerate day-dreaming' (p 507).But N,like Father Bernard again,knows that because he does not 'reach out my hand for what I want' (p 507) he achieves a limited kind of goodness,glorying in the randomness of events,attending to, but not trying to explain people and aware that the self is the great enemy.

NOTES

1.'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch',Literary Review (April 1983),31-35.

2.'The House of Fiction'.

3.See for instance,Victoria Glendinning,'Murdoch's Magician',Sunday Times 1 May 1983 p 18:Richard Devison 'Of Course' 27 April 1983,New Statesman,p 78: Nicholas Mosley 'The philosopher fails -the artist succeeds',Listener 28 April 1983,pp 18-20.

4.'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch' p 31.

5.'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch' p 31.

6.'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch' p 32.

7.Iris Murdoch,The Philosopher's Pupil (London,1983) pp 431,569.

8.See above pp 47-48.

9.Iris Murdoch,'Nostalgia for the Particular',Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 52 (1951-1952) 243-260.

10.'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch' p 31.

11.The Time of the Angels p 185.Also see above pp 132-133.

12.Nuns and Soldiers pp 288-294.See above p222.

13.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 180.

14.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 175.

15.'Existentialists and Mystics' p 174.

16.See above p 82.

CONCLUSION

It has been stated in the Introduction (see page 33) that this thesis traces the development of Iris Murdoch as a 'mystical novelist' in the terms outlined in 'Existentialists and Mystics'.The characteristics of that philosophical outlook,using 'philosophical' in a general,non-technical sense,find their most recent expression in Father Bernard Jacoby's letter to N at the conclusion of The Philosopher's Pupil (pp 569-572);there is no God,there is only the material world,but that very material world is, when seen correctly,a spiritual world.This view is,as Iris Murdoch herself has commented ,related to Buddhism,although she has also claimed that she is not a Buddhist.

What she has increasingly acknowledged is that she is a Platonist,and the shadow of her impassioned account of Plato's myth of the cave in 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts'[2] can be seen in the novels published after 1967.In three of the novels (The Nice and the Good (1968), Henry and Cato (1976) and The Philosopher's Pupil (1983)) there are incidents which have a direct connection with her account of Plato's myth.John Ducane makes the link as he waits for the tide to rise in Gunnar's cave (The Nice and the Good Chapter 36) between the escape from the cave and killing 'the little rat' of the self.And Cato Forbes discovers in the hell of his underground prison (Henry and Cato pp 266-269) that he has lived by the light of his ego.Tom McCaffrey,the most innocent of the three,finds nothing in the cavern beneath the Institute which can guide his actions (The Philosopher's Pupil pp 518-525),and it is only on his emergence into the daylight that he can act decisively and take Hattie from Rozanov.However these direct allusions are of less general significance than the insistent equation between a selfless love of the world and the knowledge that this selflessness enables one to move towards the good.There is no explicit analysis in the novels which argues out this position,but a series of images which show how such concepts can enable moral growth in those characters who can shed,to some extent,their selfish fantasies.

One of the central points of Iris Murdoch's related aesthetic is that the novel needs an increased sense of the 'opacity of persons'[3],and she has been much criticized for failing to produce characters that critics feel are sufficiently real.[4] But Iris Murdoch's characters are indeed opaque;they are not given extensive and subtle psychological descriptions by which we may assess their motivation and their self-awareness.We know them by their actions and by their fantasies.Since,for Iris Murdoch,human beings are characterized by their hugely active egos,it is not surprising that the novels show us an inability on the part of most of their characters to see themselves accurately.Similarly,since human beings are impenetrable to us (a point which is a fundamental of the philosophical problem of Knowledge of Other Minds) there is no reason to expect extensive descriptions of the mental processess of characters.That they have inner lives is undeniable,but that these should be easily understood is foolishly simplistic.

Iris Murdoch's earliest major critic,A.S.Byatt states that the naturalistic idea of character is the 'literary equivalent of the moral idea of the real impenetrable human person'[5].And although it is by no means clear that she thinks the novels do have naturalistic characters,she links this formulation to the 'degrees of freedom' available to the individuals in the novels.For Byatt,'freedom' is a positive linking factor in the novels with which she deals.She comments that

> The kinds of freedom studied vary,and the style and matter of the novels also vary greatly,but there is,I would maintain,a surprisingly constant unity of theme underlying the ideas of all the seven novels we have so far.[6]

Degrees of Freedom was published almost twenty years ago (1965) and is limited in an obvious way by the amount of material which was then available. That limitation also led to the study being conducted in terms of an ideology which seemed at that time to characterize Iris Murdoch's work, namely existentialism.(This error,as it can now be called,was shared by other studies published at about the same time,notably James Gindin's and Rubin Rabinovitz's.[7])

With the benefit of hindsight, Degrees of Freedom also seems bedevilled by the distinction found in 'Against Dryness' between the 'journalistic' and the 'crystalline' novel. Byatt rightly takes both of these categories as critical remarks about the twentieth century novel and therefore tries to construct a further category, the 'naturalistic' novel, which she feels describes Iris Murdoch's best work. She sees the early work as fluctuating between the 'naturalistic' triumph of The Bell and, to a lesser extent, An Unofficial Rose, and the crystalline 'fantasy-myth' of The Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head. She sees this fluctuation as leading to 'artistic discomfort and uncertainty' in The Unicorn:

> So here we have again the tension between reality, freedom of character, and the metaphysical dimension, the area of ideas created by the myth. Here, I think, it is the idea which is ultimately intractable.[8]

It is interesting here that, despite Byatt's wish to follow Iris Murdoch's early statements about the lack of importance of philosophy in her novels, and Byatt's own interest in freedom, she locates the final problem of The Unicorn as being its 'religious idea'. Byatt's real problem at this stage appears to be that Iris Murdoch's comments at that stage of her career did not provide an adequate terminology with which to discuss her novels. And she seems firmly wedded to the belief that the novelist's own comments are the most significant guide to the meaning of the fiction. Her 'Acknowledgement' reads, 'I am grateful to Iris Murdoch for reading this book in typescript and for many helpful suggestions for further reading and thought.'

Byatt is also somewhat normative, describing An Unofficial Rose as 'an excellent imitation'[9] of a real novel. Indeed, the whole of her discussion seems to work on an assumption of what a novel ought to be which is not fully open to experience. To some extent this is attributable to Byatt's reliance on Iris Murdoch's own terminology, although there also seems to be some prejudice on the part of the author.

Frank Baldanza's Iris Murdoch (1974) is also hampered by its reliance on Iris Murdoch's own vocabulary, particularly as at the time of its writing

the vocabulary it was using was already out of date.Baldanza introduces in his opening chapter the distinction made in 'Against Dryness'.Iris Murdoch,he claims,wants to write loose ,open novels but

> it would seem that,against her own will,the Jamesian,patterned, controlled,neatly ordered form asserts itself - the 'crystalline', almost narcissistically closed-in jewelled work.[10]

Baldanza has not noticed the significance of 'Existentialists and Mystics' in providing a more appropriate terminology with which to assess her work in the 1970s.He also shows a curious inability to use terms correctly in discussing her work.In his conclusion he remarks that

> Miss Murdoch's 'transcendental realism' gives her works a thorough grounding in contemporary London and in the workaday reality of the upper middle classes;this transcendence occurs as a blossoming of quirky fantasy out of the materials of the realistic context,so that she attains the richness of wonder and mystery without resort to exoticism.[11]

It is simply inaccurate to describe Iris Murdoch's mystical awareness of reality as a blossoming of 'fantasy',for it needs only the most cursory acquaintance with her ethics to know that 'fantasy' is a concept directly opposed to the real.It is the term used to describe the distorting activity of the ego as it seeks to protect itself from the demands made by the real.

The same imprecision arises in Baldanza's use of the term 'philosophical'. For him,Iris Murdoch is a philosophical novelist only in the sense that 'she is a serious novelist interested in coming to terms,by means of her fiction,with real experiential aspects of ideas like power,freedom and love.'[12] This is too weak a statement.Iris Murdoch is a philosophical novelist because she sees literature as another means to the same goal as philosophy has;they are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities.

One of the critics who seems to have best understood Iris Murdoch's ideas is neither concerned with her as a 'philosophical' novelist nor with her work as a whole.Robert Scholes,in both The Fabulators and

Fabulation and Metafiction[13], deals only with The Unicorn, placing it in the company of John Barth's Giles Goat Boy[14] as a 'modern allegory'. Interestingly enough, Scholes introduces Plato into his general discussion:

> What Plato was really asking was 'What good is poetry as philosophy?' - since for him philosophy already had a monopoly on both truth and goodness.[15]

And this enables Scholes to accept a much greater sense of fiction being influenced by ideas than seems available to many critics. He is also not so hampered as some critics by normative views as to what the novel should be. He, like Iris Murdoch in her philosophy, is prepared to see and to encourage, a return to older fictional forms, in this case allegory, which he claims 'amounts to seeing life through ideational filters provided by philosophy or theology'.[16] This seems to be one of the most satisfactory statements of the way in which Iris Murdoch might be a 'philosophical novelist', and yet that is not the goal that Scholes has set himself to tackle. He also proposes a distinction which bears a remarkable similarity to Iris Murdoch's distinction between the 'existentialist' and the 'mystical' novel. Scholes distinguishes between the 'fiction of existence' and the 'fiction of essence'. For the fiction of existence, reality 'is a behaviouristically observable reality'. This is opposed to the fiction of essence, which

> is that allegory which probes and develops metaphysical questions and ideals. It is concerned most with ethical ideas and absolutes of value, where behaviourist fiction emphasizes the relative values of action in practice.[17]

What is particularly interesting here is that Scholes is discussing form at this point, and that his discussion has become very much a discussion of differences in ideology. It has been the assumption of this thesis that formal qualities are largely determined by the ideas which lay behind them. Scholes's discussion is, however, only of The Unicorn, although his more general points suggest an approach to Iris Murdoch's work as a whole which could be most fruitful.

Some of the limitations of Richard Todd's Iris Murdoch:The Shakespearian Interest have been discussed above[18],but in general his book suffers from its inevitable partial treatment of the subject.Of eighteen novels available to him[19] he only deals with five (The Nice and the Good,Bruno's Dream, A Fairly Honourable Defeat,An Accidental Man and The Black Prince) in any depth,and fails to make a convincing case linking Iris Murdoch's work to Shakespeare.In his conclusion,indeed,he comes back to an idea which seems oddly at variance with his particular concern:

> The novels,however topical their subject matter,expressly avoid, for the most part,modernist experimentation,and as novels look back to fictional models provided by the nineteenth century rather than by our own.[20]

Todd seems here to have misread the essay on which he bases much of his argument.'Against Dryness' argues quite clearly that the relationship between the individual and society which obtained in the nineteenth century is no longer available[21].And,although it may be a matter of regret that nineteenth century novels are no longer written,this is not put forward as a reason for following nineteenth century models.What the essay claims is that we need to rediscover the idea of character,but,it is implied,in terms which fit the nature of twentieth century existence.After all,it is the 'journalistic' novel which is the pale imitation of the nineteenth century novel.Todd's book is another of those which makes no reference at all to the later essay 'Existentialists and Mystics'.

Elizabeth Dipple's Iris Murdoch:Work for the Spirit is the most comprehensive and impressive study of Iris Murdoch's work to appear to date (January 1984).She bases her approach on an extensive treatment of the novels grouped thematically rather than chronologically.This has the merit of making connections,for instance between The Unicorn and The Sea, The Sea,the joint subjects of Chapter Nine,but the much more serious disadvantage of completely concealing the slowly evolving nature of Iris Murdoch's thought.Indeed,Elizabeth Dipple tends to play down the

significance of ideas in Iris Murdoch's work in general.She claims that The Fire and the Sun argues for

> the supremacy of art over dialectic,and although the philosophical impulse present in Murdoch's fiction at the level of allusion from the beginning remains,it is very much in a secondary position and is scarcely seen by the casual reader.[22]

It is hard to determine what may or may not be noticed by the casual reader, but,contrary to this assertion,the critics have been only too well aware of the philosophical impulse behind the novels,and have felt that this operated at a level higher then mere allusion.[23] It is also by no means true that Iris Murdoch argues for the superiority of art over philosophy. Iris Murdoch sees them as complementary,both searching for truth in different ways.The following comment indicates that she sees both artist and philosopher as engaged in parallel activities:

> Magic in its unregenerate form as the fantastic doctoring of the real for consumption by the private ego is the bane of art as it is of philosophy.Obsession shrinks reality to a single pattern. The artist's worst enemy is his eternal companion,the cosy dreaming ego,the dweller in the vaults of eikasia.Of course,the highest art is powered by the force of an individual unconscious mind,but then so is the highest philosophy;and in both cases technique is useless without divine fury.[24]

And she has held that position for some time,as is clear from the fact that she made substantially the same claim in her interview with Bryan Magee.[25]

Yet when Dipple claims that Iris Murdoch values art more than philosophy she comes near to making the correct point.She claims that this preference is because Iris Murdoch is 'arguing something close to intuition rather than logical cognition'[26] and it is,of course,true that Iris Murdoch's ethics are Intuitionist in the philosophical sense.[27] It is also the case that the novels provide an image of the moral world within which the truths which Iris Murdoch sees as fundamental to ethics can be demonstrated. It is in this precise philosophical sense that Iris Murdoch values intuition

and that Dipple does not identify her in this way is because she has not examined Iris Murdoch's thinking in the light of twentieth century ethics. Had she done so,she would have seen that philosophical thought is of greater significance than she is prepared to credit.

Similarly,by claiming that earlier critics 'tend to overestimate existentialism by concentrating on Murdoch's early study of Sartre'[28]; she gives herself neither the opportunity to register Iris Murdoch's early ambivalence over the 'appealing ' existentialist hero while maintaining a philosophical hostility to existentialism.[29] She also fails to recognize that existentialism is seen by Iris Murdoch as the root source of the picture of modern consciousness to which she objects in both 'Against Dryness' and 'Existentialists and Mystics'.

But then,Elizabeth Dipple does not list 'Existentialists and Mystics' in her bibliography,and her failure to consider this work has led to two major mis-interpretations of the novels.She persists throughout her book in asserting 'that Murdoch is primarily a religious writer'.[30] To make this claim seems to fly in the face of Iris Murdoch's repeated assertions that there is no God and that what <u>was</u> a sense of religious significance must be re-introduced in a specifically secular context.[31] Secular mysticism,though it may be a substitute for a vanished religion,is not the same thing,and, particularly in a Western European society,it is misleading to claim Iris Murdoch as a religious writer where religion is still generally equated with Christianity.

Her second mis-interpretation stems from the first.Because she sees Iris Murdoch as a religious writer,Dipple tends to undervalue those characters,such as Henry Marshalson or Tim and Gertrude Reede who settle for a limited secondary moral goal.She tends to see those who cannot attain the distant goal of perfection as failures,and that is not at all in keeping with Iris Murdoch's ethics.The goal is impossibly distant,but it must be accepted that human creatures are flawed and that they must achieve what virtue they can in the light of that goal.Here too,Dipple's non-chronological approach works against her,for it is only in the slow

evolution of Iris Murdoch's thought through the novels that this can be seen.

To summarize Iris Murdoch's moral thinking is to risk over-simplification and to blur some distinctions.Nonetheless,it is necessary in order to show clearly that her work does not reflect a static set of ideas.The early[32] novels are generally concerned with developing a sense of the limitations of a broadly 'existentialist' view.This view is seen as solipsistic,denying the realities,whether they be social,natural or artistic,that surround one, and as finally collapsing under the insistent pressure of the real.They tend to question whether freedom is a significant or useful moral concept.In the middle period there are still novels which make use of this basic conception, but with a greater elaboration on the ways in which the ego can work,and the kinds of machinery that it can produce.But,in accordance with the change in philosophical position which she mentioned to W.K.Rose[33], there is an exploration of the significance of love as a moral concept,and of some of its associated secondary virtues,such as forgiveness,reconciliation and justice.There is also the first rather bleak articulation of the impossibility of attaining goodness,and a real sense that love means the negation of the self and is to be equated with death.In the later work there is a continuing and developing sense of the significance of love,but a corresponding growth in the presentation of human imperfection.But that imperfection is seen charitably;perfection is an unattainable goal,but people can accept and understand their 'moral level'.It is almost as if Iris Murdoch,having established the primacy of love and its equation with death,starts to imagine and develop the secondary concepts which must support the moral pyramid.

Throughout this exploration of the moral world there is a constant awareness,as the recurrence of first-person narrations makes clear,of the power of the ego to distort reality.But also as the 'monsters of egoism', Hilary Burde and Charles Arrowby,stalk through their pages,the later novels present a more thoroughgoing sense of the transcendence of reality.This is to be found even in Under the Net as Jake finds he cannot explain the

colouring of Mrs Tinckham's cats,but in the most recent novels it has been developed so that the external world can,when seen without the interference of the self,be an indication of the existence of the good. It is that because it is beyond the control of the self and because it is beautiful,and the love which can acknowledge that beauty is participating in the moral progress outlined in The Symposium by Diotima speaking to Socrates[34],and which finds its fullest expression in the myth of the cave in The Republic of Plato.

NOTES

1. See The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition: Interviews with English and American Novelists, edited by Heide Ziegler and Christopher Bigsby, (London, 1982), 209-230, p 212.

2. The Sovereignty of Good pp 100-101. See above pp24-26.

3. 'Against Dryness' p 20.

4. See for instance Bernard Bergonzi, The Situation of the Novel pp 47-49 (cited above p 1) and Linda Kuehl, 'The Novelist as Magician: The Magician as Artist' (cited above p 119) and A.S. Byatt, Degrees of Freedom pp 124-125.

5. Degrees of Freedom p 11.

6. Degrees of Freedom p 11.

7. James Gindin, Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes (London, 1962) pp12, 230 and Rub n Rabinovitz, The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel 1950-1960 (New York and London, 1967) p 166.

8. Degrees of Freedom p 207.

9. Degrees of Freedom p 202.

10. Iris Murdoch p 20.

11. Iris Murdoch p 174.

12. Iris Murdoch p 14.

13. Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York, 1967), and Fabulation and Metafiction. The second book is a longer version of the first, although the material on Iris Murdoch is substantially the same.

14. John Barth, Giles Goat-Boy, or The Revised New Syllabus (London, 1967) First published in New York, 1966.

15. Fabulation and Metafiction p 23.

16. Fabulation and Metafiction p 51.

17. Fabulation and Metafiction pp 109-110.

18. See above pp 161-164.

19. See Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest p 7. Todd points out here that The Sea, The Sea was omitted from his book because it was published when his book 'was in a late stage of development'. It would have been an obvious candidate for inclusion as both Charles Arrowby and other characters draw parallels between Charles and Prospero.

20. Iris Murdoch: The Shakesperian Interest p 120.

21. 'Against Dryness' p 18. See above pp 27-29.

22. Work for the Spirit p 5.

23. See for example Degrees of Freedom p181 (cited above p 4), The Disciplined Heart pp 8, 166, Postwar British Fiction p 10, and

Ruben Rabinovitz Iris Murdoch,p45 (cited above p 4).See also pp 3-6 above.

24.The Fire and the Sun p79.Iris Murdoch deals with this topic between pp 78 and 88 of this work.

25.See Men of Ideas p 269:
"I think it is more fun to be an artist than a philosopher." She then goes on to say that,though 'different',both are 'truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities.'

26.Work for the Spirit p 7.

27.See above pp 13-20.

28.Work for the Spirit p 29.

29.See above pp 10-13.

30.Work for the Spirit p 243.

31.See 'On God and Good' and 'Existentialists and Mystics' and above. pp 20-22,31-33.

32.See the classification at p 39.Early novels are those between Under the Net and A Severed Head:middle period novels between An Unofficial Rose and An Accidental Man:and late novels from The Black Prince.

33.'Iris Murdoch,Informally' p 64.Cited above pp 112,151.

34.Quoted above p 45.

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